The lives of songs: An exploration of how new songs become part of young children’s musical cultures

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This work has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution. This work is original and the product of my research endeavour.

........................................

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Table of Contents

Table of contents.................................................................................................i
List of tables and figures....................................................................................viii
Abstract...............................................................................................................x

Chapter One: ........................................................................................................ 1
  Overview............................................................................................................. 2
  Rationale and aims ............................................................................................ 4
  Background ......................................................................................................... 8
    Music and song in our lives........................................................................... 8
    Young children’s musical cultures................................................................. 9
    Songs and music education............................................................................ 10
      Qualities of songs for children ................................................................. 11
    Ethnomusicological perspectives on children’s songs................................. 12
    Young children’s musical development....................................................... 13
    Socio-cultural perspectives ......................................................................... 14
  Structure of the thesis ...................................................................................... 18
  Summary ............................................................................................................ 21

Chapter Two: ........................................................................................................ 23
  Overview .......................................................................................................... 24
    Ecological elements ....................................................................................... 25
    Communicative musicality .......................................................................... 26
  Cultural and social perspectives ...................................................................... 30
    Ethnomusicology ......................................................................................... 30
      Songs as social control .............................................................................. 33
  Music education perspectives ......................................................................... 40
  Sociology perspectives .................................................................................... 43
    Peer social cultures ...................................................................................... 43
    The commodification of children’s musical cultures ................................... 45
  Early childhood perspectives: Reflective pedagogy ...................................... 48
Chapter Two: Preparing researchers and children for making sense of the world through music

Songs and singing ........................................................................................................ 50

Creative arts perspectives: Song writer as researcher .............................................. 50
Early childhood perspectives: Singing and play ....................................................... 50
Music therapy perspectives: songs and well-being .................................................. 52
Summary ...................................................................................................................... 54

Chapter Three: .......................................................................................................... 56
Overview .................................................................................................................. 57
Research methods in early childhood music education ........................................... 58
Theoretical framework ............................................................................................. 59
Ethnography ............................................................................................................. 59
Participatory research with children ....................................................................... 66
Creative Arts Research ............................................................................................. 74
Portraiture ................................................................................................................ 76

Research questions .................................................................................................. 79
Research approach ................................................................................................... 80
Selection of field research site and participants ..................................................... 80
Development of data generation strategies ............................................................. 81
Ethics ....................................................................................................................... 82
Data analysis ........................................................................................................... 82
Validity .................................................................................................................... 83

Investigating the processes of song writing ............................................................. 88
Field research ........................................................................................................... 90
The site – Schubert Road Child Care Centre ............................................................ 90
Time period of fieldwork ....................................................................................... 90
Participants ............................................................................................................. 91
Researcher ............................................................................................................. 93
Ethics in the field .................................................................................................... 94
Data generation in the field – settling in phase ....................................................... 95
Trialling data generation strategies ....................................................................... 98
Data generation in the field - Main phase ............................................................... 99
The children’s voices ............................................................................................. 101
Analysing data in the field .................................................................................... 102
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life cycle metaphor</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher/ portraitist</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing validity</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Four:</strong></td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting and subjects</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schubert Road Child Care Centre</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and staff of the Eager Beavers room</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduating group</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger Eager Beavers</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prelude</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging themes</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudness</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative musicality</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance to an audience</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of children’s music products and community musical cultures</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Five:</strong></td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview – introducing the portrait</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The six songs</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrait of the life cycles of six songs</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life begins: Conceptions</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs inspired by children’s interests prior to field research</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs inspired by children’s interests during field research</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs inspired by other songs</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing the songs: Gestations</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First decisions</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Creating narratives ............................................................. 170
Role playing through music .................................................. 172
Creating potential for active participation ............................ 175
Creating music and lyrics ...................................................... 177
Little steam train ................................................................. 178
Look around at the colours .................................................... 182
First space song: What does an astronaut need? ................. 185
Space is a really big place .................................................... 192
If a dinosaur came to your house ......................................... 195
The little pigs’ chorus .......................................................... 198
I’m a drummer in a band ....................................................... 201
Comparisons of musical features ......................................... 205
Comparisons of forms of engagement .................................. 208
Reflections on conceptions and gestations of the six songs ... 209
Introducing the six songs to the Eager Beavers: Births ......... 210
Songs created prior to field research .................................... 211
Songs introduced by a staff member prior to my first visit .... 211
Songs introduced by the song writer/researcher .................. 212
Songs created during field research ..................................... 217
Early development: Infancies ............................................... 227
Little steam train ............................................................... 227
I’m a drummer in a band ...................................................... 229
Look around at the colours .................................................. 232
Space is a really big place .................................................... 242
If a dinosaur came to your house ......................................... 245
The little pigs’ chorus ......................................................... 247
Growing up: Childhoods ...................................................... 249
Little steam train ............................................................... 249
I’m a drummer in a band ...................................................... 254
Look around at the colours .................................................. 261
Space is a really big place .................................................... 276
If a dinosaur came to your house ......................................... 281
The little pigs’ chorus ........................................................ 287
Chapter Six: ................................................................................. 305
Overview ................................................................................................ 306
Introduction – the portraits in miniature ................................................. 306
The portraitist ......................................................................................... 308
Tools and techniques ............................................................................. 316
Ethnography ....................................................................................... 317
Participatory approaches to researching with children ...................... 318
Creative arts research methodologies .................................................... 323
Portraiture ........................................................................................... 324
Validity ............................................................................................... 326
The audience .......................................................................................... 328
Limitations of the research ..................................................................... 329
Implications ........................................................................................... 330
For early childhood and music educators ........................................... 331
For song writers .................................................................................. 333
For researchers and for future research .............................................. 333
Conclusion ............................................................................................. 336
Reference List ........................................................................................ 338

Appendix One: ............................................................................ 353
Introducing the collection ...................................................................... 354
Why research children’s songs? ......................................................... 354
Children and music ............................................................................. 355
Research methods ............................................................................... 356
Wearing many hats: Researcher/ song writer/ singer ......................... 358
Theories and themes ........................................................................... 360
The lives of the six songs ..................................................................... 363
Musical commodities and popular culture................................. 414
I’m a drummer in a band................................................................. 416
Conception .................................................................................. 417
Gestation ..................................................................................... 417
Birth .............................................................................................. 421
Infancy .......................................................................................... 421
Childhood ..................................................................................... 423
Reflections: Songs for, with or by children? .............................. 427
Conclusion ................................................................................... 429

Appendix Two: ........................................................................... 432
List of tables and figures

Tables
Table 1.1 Research questions and data generation strategies .................... 17
Table 3.1 Research participants and data generation ................................ 91
Table 3.2 Life cycle metaphor for interpretation and analysis of data .......101
Table 5.1 Potential forms of participation in the six songs ...................... 175
Table 5.2 Potential for exploration of musical elements in the six songs..175
Table 5.3 Comparison of musical features of the six songs .................... 204
Table 5.4 Initial engagement responses to the six songs ......................... 224
Table 6.1 Data sources for the six songs .................................................. 320

Figures
Figure 2.1 Ecological elements of theoretical literature ......................... 24
Figure 3.1 Research participants ............................................................ 90
Figure 3.2 Extract from documentation for families ................................ 98
Figure 3.3 Extract from book of Space is a really big place .................... 99
Figure 3.4 Research process ................................................................. 102
Figure 3.5 Reflective processes ............................................................ 103
Figure 4.1 Photograph: Ethan sings his song to his friends ................. 131
Figure 4.2 Photograph: Impromptu performance ................................ 134
Figure 4.3 Photograph: Group time seating in a performer/audience format ......................................................................................... 137
Figure 5.1 Bridge phrase in If a dinosaur came to your house ............ 171
Figure 5.2 Creation of narrative in If a dinosaur came to your house .... 172
Figure 5.3 Use of dynamic variations to create drama in If a dinosaur came to your house ........................................................................... 172
Figure 5.4 Creation of a narrative in Space is a really big place .......... 173
Figure 5.5 Opening phrase of Little steam train ................................. 178
Figure 5.6 Opening phrase of B section of Little steam train ................. 178
Figure 5.7 Opening phrase of Look around at the colours ..................... 181
Figure 5.8 Coda of Look around at the colours .................................. 181
Figure 5.9 B section phrase forms melodic sequence in Look around at the colours ................................................................. 183
Figure 5.10 Child’s drawing and scribed description (a) ....................... 186
Figure 5.11 Child’s drawing and scribed description (b) ....................... 186
Figure 5.12 Child’s drawing and scribed description (c) ....................... 187
Figure 5.13 Child’s drawing and scribed description (d) ....................... 187
Figure 5.14 Child’s drawing and scribed description (e) ....................... 188
Figure 5.15 Opening phrase of first space song .................................. 190
Figure 5.16 First (A) section of Space is a really big place .................... 191
Figure 5.17 Opening of If a dinosaur came to your house ..................... 195
Figure 5.18 Opening phrase of Little pigs’ chorus ............................... 199
Figure 5.19 Opening phrase of I’m a drummer in a band ..................... 202
Figure 5.20 Photograph: Cody, Ethan Phil and Brian build a spaceship 219
Figure 5.21 Photograph: Gemma and Alice (central, wearing pink jackets) turn their heads to “look, look around” ................................................. 237
Figure 5.22 Photograph: Lola and Madeleine synchronise pulse in I’m a drummer in a band ................................................................. 253
Figure 5.23 Photograph of Felix in book of I’m a drummer in a band ... 258
Figure 5.24 Extract from book of Look around at the colours ............... 268
Figure 5.25 Photograph: Tara drawing a picture of space on a song sheet ................................................................................................. 277
Figure 5.26 Photograph: A rehearsal of the graduation play ................. 287
Figure 6.1 Roles of the researcher ....................................................... 307
Abstract

It is increasingly recognised that humans are innately musical, and that the early interactions of infants and mothers are based on what is known as communicative musicality. Young children’s innate musicality is often expressed through singing and their songs play a role in the cultures of most early childhood educational settings.

This research explores the lives of six original songs within the cultural context of an early childhood educational setting. Musical and social aspects of culture are explored: both the children’s cultures and the shared cultures of adults and children. The thesis incorporates creative work – tracing the writing of the six songs – and fieldwork – in which these songs are shared with children aged from three to six years. The two aspects combine to present a picture of the life cycle of the songs from their creation to their becoming part of the musical culture of one early childhood community.

The research used ethnography, portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) and a participatory approach to researching with children to explore song writing processes and the children’s interactions with me and the songs over a period of eight months. This research adds to current knowledge about song as a form of meaning-making, communication and culture; its findings support the precept that music is more fully understood as social and cultural practice.
The significance of the research lies not only in its findings but also in the methods used. Its purpose was to explore the children’s engagement with songs in relation to the context of their social and musical cultures. This was realised through the use of a unique mix of approaches drawn from the disciplines of sociology, music education, early childhood and creative arts research. A combination of techniques from ethnography, narrative and arts-based methodologies led to a detailed and resonant exploration of the lives of children’s songs.
Chapter One:

Introduction
When I listen to someone else performing my music it is clear the music has left its creator and has a life of its own. But the nub of the question remains... ‘what does this music – or any music – do within our present society, and what do I think I am doing by composing it?’


**Overview**

During many years of singing with children as an early childhood educator I have been part of a process by which songs attain, as Tippett says, “a life of [their] own” (1974, as cited in Swanwick, 1987, p. 3). More recently in writing my own songs, I have gained a new perspective on this process, which can be viewed as a life cycle: that of a creator. This has inspired me to undertake ethnographic research to understand how songs acquire such a ‘life’.

The resulting project, presented in this thesis, explores the lives of six songs within the socio-cultural context of an early childhood educational setting. It incorporates creative work (tracing the writing of six songs) and fieldwork (during which these songs were shared with children aged from three to six years). The two aspects combine to present a picture of the life cycle of the six songs from their creation to their becoming part of the musical culture of one early childhood community.
The research used ethnography, the narrative method known as portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) and a participatory approach to researching with children, to explore song writing processes and the children’s interactions with me and the songs over a period of eight months. The thesis incorporates a survey of literature, a discussion of methodology and design, a narrative portrait of the life cycles of six songs, song manuscripts and audio recordings. These elements combine so that the two distinct phases of the research form an integrated whole.

Music lies at the core of the research, as the songs are not only its focus but also the primary means of generating data with the children. Through the use of portraiture, the thesis has integrated creative and research processes, focusing on an aesthetic interpretation and presentation of research, and including annotated song collections for children and educators. These collections are intended as aesthetic vehicles for the sharing of the songs and research findings with audiences beyond the academy.

As well as contributing to the literature of early childhood and music education, this research contributes to the fields of arts-based and practice-led inquiry (Piantanida, McMahon & Garman, 2003; Barrett & Bolt, 2007). The writing of the songs involved both creative work and research, as the processes of creating music and lyrics reflect knowledge of young children’s musical and general development, as well knowledge of early childhood pedagogy. The fieldwork phase took the songs which comprised the outcomes of the creative phase of research, and evaluated them in the
field as the songs developed lives of their own (Tippett, 1974 as cited in Swanwick, 1987) through being sung with children.

**Rationale and aims**

The proposition that humans are innately musical beings and that music is a necessary part of life (Blacking, 1976; Dissanayake, 2006; Malloch, 1999/2000) underpins this research. Recent study of the protomusical behaviours of infants supports this proposition, as it shows the central role that these behaviours play in early emotional, social and cognitive development (Cross, 2003; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). Young children’s innate musicality is often expressed through singing (Campbell, 1998; Whiteman, 2001) and their songs play a role in the cultures of most early childhood educational settings. Though styles and contexts may vary, songs are an integral part of most young children’s days.

This exploration of the life cycles of new songs adds to current knowledge about song as a form of meaning-making, communication and culture, building on the precept that music is more fully understood as social and cultural practice (Middleton, 2003). While there has been much research on children’s singing, there are still some aspects which have not been widely explored. Music education researchers have studied technical aspects of singing such as pitch awareness and singing voice development (Rutkowski & Chen-Haftek, 2000; Flowers & Dunne-Sousa, 1990). Ethnomusicologists
have investigated the styles and functions of children’s songs in a range of non-Western cultures (Blacking, 1967; Merriam, 1964). However there is scant research on what songs and singing mean to children, and how they influence the musical cultures of early childhood educational settings. There is also little research on the musical and linguistic qualities of children’s songs, outside that of folklorists.

Both musical and social aspects of culture within an early childhood educational setting have been presented in this research, as it explored the children’s social cultures (Corsaro, 2005) and the shared cultures of adults and children. The children’s developing relationships with the songs were viewed in the context of these cultures. Corsaro’s theory that children actively create their cultures through a process he terms interpretive reproduction provided an important theoretical framework. The research also explored the role of communicative musicality (CM) (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) as the basis of children’s music-making.

A broad aim of this research was to deepen understanding of the role of songs in young children’s lives. This aim was both professional and personal. As well as highlighting the importance of singing as a form of social and cultural communication and meaning-making for young children, the research was undertaken with the aim of enriching and further developing my skills as a writer of songs for young children.
This aim arose from the findings of previous research (Niland, 2005) into children’s engagement with a set of songs in an early childhood music curriculum. That research was undertaken as a form of evaluation of my own practice as an early childhood music educator. After completing it, I began to write songs for children using the insights gained, drawing as well on my musical training and enculturated knowledge of children’s songs. The intention in this current research was to share my original songs with children and study their engagement and the processes by which the new songs became part of existing musical cultures. Whereas my previous research had been based around structured observations and a rating tool, this research was designed to be more naturalistic and in depth. Therefore the methodologies of ethnography and portraiture were chosen.

Methods used in this research, as well as insights gained, make it relevant for early childhood and music educators. Greater understanding of the role of songs and singing in young children’s lives will enable practitioners to select and use songs in ways that are more meaningful and relevant to children. The use of non-traditional approaches to researching young children’s interactions with songs, focusing on aspects of context, relationships and cultures rather than on isolated behaviours, also offers educators new perspectives on working with children, by demonstrating links between research and pedagogical practices.

In the fieldwork phase, strategies were developed for researching collaboratively with young children, inspired by reflective approaches to
early childhood pedagogy evident in contemporary curricula (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; NZ Ministry of Education, 1996) and from the philosophies and practices of the Reggio Emilia early childhood centres (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006). These contemporary early childhood pedagogical approaches place a high value on understanding children’s views and considering them in the development of curriculum. Research which explores children’s perspectives therefore provides valuable insights for educational practitioners, as well as introducing them to strategies for working in more collaborative learning and teaching relationships with young children.

The key purpose of any research is to bring new knowledge and perspectives to other researchers and practitioners in relevant fields. However, research can and often does bring about change for the participants themselves. Ethnographic research such as this, which focused on exploration of relationships and aspects of life within a naturalistic setting over a long period of time, can have many professional and personal benefits for all participants. The children and staff with whom I worked were able to participate in singing and music-making, which led to changes in the centre’s musical culture. For me, the experience of participating in the life of an early childhood centre was a pleasure and a privilege. As well as this, the relationships formed and insights gained had a profound effect on me as a researcher, song writer and educator.
My experiences illuminated the potential of post-modern thinking on ethnographic research in fields such as anthropology and ethnomusicology, which recognizes and celebrates this hitherto little recognized purpose of research. As Beaudry states, field research “not only informs us about the ‘Other’ but also in very significant ways enlightens us about ourselves” (1997, p. 64). The narrative portraits in this thesis contain extensive evidence of the reciprocal benefits of the research for me as a song writer, early childhood educator and researcher.

**Background**

**Music and song in our lives**

It is increasingly recognised that humans are innately musical, and that the early interactions of infants and mothers are based on what is known as communicative musicality (Dissanayake, 2006; Malloch, 1999/2000; Papousek, 1996; Trevarthen, 2000). Communicative musicality (CM) refers to the vocally-based musical interactions that are commonly shared between mothers/primary carers and infants. It is probable that the fundamental importance of songs in our lives is founded in such early musical behaviours. Exploration of CM in older children is central to this research.

In many societies and cultures, past and present, songs and participation in singing play a prominent role in people’s lives and cultures (Gregory, 1997). In contemporary urban cultures around the world, the popularity of digital MP3 players, karaoke and television shows such as Pop Idol indicate
that this is equally true today. “Popular song continues to capture the hearts and minds of every generation” (Baker & Wigram, 2005, p.12). This situation emphasises the need for research into our relationships with song.

Singing is behaviour in which infants and young children naturally engage, and is often the foundation of early childhood music education (Barrett, 2006; Bridges, 1994; Feierabend, 1996). For educators, understanding the interaction and communication potential of songs and singing, as well as the ways in which children build relationships with songs, will enable them to enrich and extend young children’s innate musicality.

Songs are a prominent part of children’s lives, at home and in early childhood educational settings. In a study of differences in Australian children’s attitudes to singing at school and at home, Cobb (2007) found that while children’s attitudes to school singing became increasingly negative as they grow older, children engaged in a lot of singing at home, which influenced the formation of their musical identities. Interestingly, she found that children at five years of age had fairly positive attitudes to singing at school, which suggests that singing in early childhood educational settings is likely to be an enjoyable and meaningful experience for most children.

**Young children’s musical cultures**

In the last ten years there has been a growing focus on the study of children’s musical identities in music education research (Campbell, 2002; Young, 2007). The research, which focuses mainly on middle childhood
and adolescence, suggests that there is a widening gap between music education curriculum content and the styles of music which interest children in their home and cultural lives. Studies such as Cobb’s (2007), mentioned above, indicate that the formation of musical identity as children grow is strongly influenced by the music which permeates their daily lives, music which often bears little relation to that experienced in schools.

Current research suggests that music educators should find ways to incorporate the music that is part of everyday life into music education curricula (Campbell & Lum, 2007; Young, 2007). Given that music is commonly a central part of early childhood education, educators of young children can play a key role in integrating children’s family and community musical cultures into their curricula. The development of a deeper understanding of young children’s relationships with songs can assist early childhood educators in this process.

**Songs and music education**

One aspect of children’s singing which has been widely researched is the development of singing skills. A lot is known about singing voice acquisition (Rutkowski & Chen-Haftek, 2000; Rutkowski, 1990) and about the development of pitch accuracy in children (Apfelstadt, 1984; Cooper, 1992; Flowers & Dunne-Sousa, 1990; Gordon, 1997). However little investigation has been done into what children sing and what songs mean to them. As Whiteman says: “Children’s songs do reveal important musical
information, but they also reveal valuable information about children themselves” (2001, p. 3).

In the body of research on children’s invented or spontaneous songs, some attention has been paid to the content as well as to the technical aspects of children’s singing (Barrett, 2006; Davies, 1992; Whiteman, 2001). Researchers have found that spontaneous singing is a common part of young children’s play (Bjørkvold, 1989; Davidson, 1994; Davies, 1992; Moog, 1976). Some studies have shown its value for the development of musical concepts and skills, creativity (Smithrim, 1997), communication and meaning-making (Barrett, 2000). Children’s relationships with composed songs, however, have mainly been examined in relation to the use of a particular song repertoire to build musical skills through the Kodaly or Orff approaches to music education (Campbell & Scott Kassner, 2006; Forrai, 1998).

**Qualities of songs for children**

Songs written for young children have specific attributes aimed at engaging attention and participation. These attributes reflect the play interests of children as well as their musical and general developmental capabilities (Haines & Gerber, 1992). Such songs tend to be short, involve a melody with limited pitch range and narrow intervals, and include repetition and/or a predictable structure in both music and lyrics. Lyrics will typically focus on an aspect of life which is relevant and interesting to young children.
Songs composed for young children often invite active participation and playful interaction, as well as a range of musical behaviours: vocalizing, singing, chanting, responding to beat and rhythm, expressive body movement, dramatisation, improvisation, and exploration of tempo and dynamics through sound making and/or movement (Bridges, 1994; Campbell & Scott Kassner, 2006). It is through these multiple forms of participation that children engage with the elements of music, and thus develop musically.

**Ethnomusicological perspectives on children’s songs**

“Musics are special kinds of symbol systems and special kinds of social actions, which people use to communicate and to make sense of their worlds” (Byron, 1995, p. 26). This is particularly relevant to the music-making of young children. Much of the behavioural research into young children’s singing mentioned earlier tends to view the behaviours as being important primarily for the purpose of developing musical skills. However, contemporary qualitative research views music in the broader context of children’s lives, and recognizes that music has deeper and wider purposes which far exceed the scope of its role in educational curriculum (Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Lum, 2007). Such research resonates with ethnomusicology scholars such as Blacking, who recognised that children’s experience of songs is part of their growth and development as humans and members of communities and cultures. It is this view of music-making that is explored in this research.
Blacking’s view (Byron, 1995) is particularly relevant to singing, because songs integrate two languages or semiotic codes - music and verbal language. Music itself is a semiotic code, and musical elements such as tonality, rhythm, tempo and dynamics convey meaning on many levels (Van Leeuwen, 1999). The musical elements in a song will often support the meaning of lyrics. The interplay of melody and lyrics is an important area of exploration for me as both song writer and researcher. It is a consideration when writing songs and an influential factor in children’s engagement with songs. Analysis of this interplay is contained in the narrative portrait of the lives of songs in Chapter Five of this thesis.

**Young children’s musical development**

Knowledge of the musical development of young children, gained through professional training and experiences, as well as study of research literature, has significantly influenced both the song writing and fieldwork phases of this research. This knowledge influenced creation of the music and lyrics, musical interactions with children and interpretation of data. The various roles I adopted during the research were shaped by my training and experience as an early childhood and music educator and researcher. During fieldwork in particular, my role as a participant observer incorporated an approach to singing with young children based on understanding of their musical and general development. Research literature on young children’s musical development is discussed further in the next chapter.
Socio-cultural perspectives

Singing is often a community experience, particularly in early childhood and school settings. Ethnomusicology research highlights the importance of community musical environments (Mans, 2002). However, most research on young children’s singing has been conducted in educational or home settings, with a focus on individual behaviours, and does not take socio-cultural aspects of children’s experiences into account.

There is also minimal cross-cultural music education research into children’s singing development. A few studies have compared Chinese and American children’s pitch accuracy (Chen-Haftek, 1998) and have found that children whose first language is tonally based, as Chinese is, develop accurate pitch in singing at an earlier age than English speaking children.

Research which explores young children’s singing within the wider context of their lives and cultures can provide much rich data, and deepen our understanding of music in children’s lives. Just as contemporary research into child development now focuses less on the individual child and recognises that wider social and cultural influences contribute significantly to children’s development and learning (Rogoff, 2003), so music education research is now beginning to focus on those broader influences. There is a growing body of literature on children’s music-making which is crossing discipline boundaries and focusing on socio-cultural influences such as technology, mass musical cultures and peer musical cultures (Arthur, 2005; Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Young, 2007). Those involved in this
research draw on ethnomusicology, sociology and anthropology to broaden the perspectives of music education research (Young, 2007).

Some studies point out the need for music educators to recognise the musical development which occurs through the use of musical technology and popular music (Campbell, 2002). Researchers such as Cobb (2007) have pointed to a mismatch between children’s music-making capabilities and interests and the music-making which is provided in educational settings. An implication of these research findings is the need for music educators to harness aspects of the musical cultures of the 21st century.

The growing interest in researching children’s music-making from a socio-cultural perspective corresponds with changing perspectives and approaches to researching other aspects of children’s lives. Many researchers are now recognising that children’s perspectives can best be explored by consulting children themselves. Increasingly researchers are recognising the significance of children’s voices being heard and for children to be seen as participants in, rather than subjects of, research (Christensen & James, 2000; Pole, 2007). These perspectives informed the way this research used participatory techniques to encourage children’s collaborative participation in the generation and interpretation of data about their singing.

As this research is ethnographic, it has some similarity to ethnomusicological research. While ethnomusicology is often concerned with analysing the features of the music of diverse cultures, underpinning
this is the desire to better understand the role of music in people’s lives (Blacking, 1967). Blacking wrote extensively of the role of music in bringing people together and making them feel part of a group. This can certainly be seen as one of the roles of singing in the cultures of most Australian early childhood educational settings. Blacking described music as “a kind of language that is culturally rooted and socially enacted” (as cited in Byron, 1995, p. 1). The research presented in this thesis focused on exploration of the cultural and social as well as the musical aspects of children’s relationships with song, portrayed through the narrative portrait of the life cycles of the six songs.

The focus of the fieldwork phase of this research was on the musical culture of one micro community, a child care centre. Culture has been defined in many different ways. Nettl favours Tylor’s definition of culture - “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capacities or habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1871, as cited in Nettl, 1983, p. 132) - as being broad enough to be relevant today to ethnomusicology. Anthropologist and noted ethnographer Clifford Geertz favours a definition of culture based on that of Max Weber, who believed that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. [Geertz] take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). Geertz’s definition aptly describes the rich complexity of interactions, relationships,
practices and beliefs which comprise the cultures of early childhood centres.

The view of children as active agents in creating their social cultures, through a process of “interpretive reproduction” (Corsaro, 2005, p. 4) provided an important framework for the interpretation of data in this research. Corsaro sees children as being active producers of culture through their peer interactions and relationships. This view of children is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and underpins a growing body of research into children’s understanding of aspects of their lives and communities (Christensen & James, 2000; Fraser, Lewis, Ding, Kellett, & Robinson, 2004; Green & Hogan, 2005). The notion of interpretive reproduction is explored in relation to the children’s modes of engagement with my songs as well as in relation to their social interactions around the songs.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main research question</th>
<th>How do new songs become part of young children’s musical cultures?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary research questions</strong></td>
<td>How can the musical culture of the early childhood educational setting be defined?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How does this musical culture influence the children’s engagement with new songs?</td>
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<td>How do social interactions, peer relationships, home culture and gender influence children’s relationships with new songs?</td>
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<td>What aspects of the new songs composed by the researcher/song writer are most engaging for children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data generation strategies</td>
<td>Reflective journaling on song writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written notes on participant observation at research site</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Video and audio recordings of children’ singing and musical play at research site</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversations with children and early childhood staff at research site – general and using data artefacts as focus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Children’s drawings</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical documentation of data for families at research site</td>
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**Table 1.1** Research questions and data generation strategies

**Structure of the thesis**

This introductory chapter, which presents some background to the research and explains its aims, is followed by a literature review (Chapter Two). The literature review explores relevant research and theory across several disciplines. Research from ethnomusicology provides an overview of the structure and functions of children’s songs in history and across cultures. This allows presentation of a broader focus on music in children’s lives. It also provides insights into definitions of culture and the role of music in culture. Research from within music psychology provides knowledge of communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009), now widely regarded as illuminating the innate musicality of humans and as the basis of our musical development. Research in music education provides
understanding of the development of musical skills as children grow. The
discussion of music education research focuses on research into children’s
singing in particular. It also explores some recent research which has
examined the influences of technology and popular media culture on
children’s music-making. Research on children’s songs is presented, and
gaps in the knowledge in this area are explored. Research from the
sociology of childhood provides information on how children actively
create their cultures through peer social interaction.

Chapter Three discusses the diverse methodologies which underpin the
research and explores related theoretical literature. The research design
draws on a range of methods: ethnography, reflective practice in the
disciplines of both early childhood and creative arts, as well as the narrative
method of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). The
development of strategies for field research and for the use of participatory
approaches to working with young children are explained.

Chapter Four introduces the setting for, and participants in, the research and
presents an interpretation of some field data through a narrative portrait of
the musical culture of the child care centre. It explores aesthetic, cultural
and social aspects of this culture, with a particular focus on the influence of
popular media culture on the children’s music-making. Some connections
with musical aspects of early childhood institutional cultures in Australia
are drawn.
Chapter Five integrates the creative and fieldwork phases of the research, through a narrative portrait of six of the songs shared with children at the research site. This portrait, which is structured as a metaphorical life cycle, traces the creation of the songs and the theoretical and creative roots of this process. It then tells the story of the children’s developing relationships with each song, interpreting the story through various theoretical lenses, with a particular focus on interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005) and communicative musicality (CM) (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). This chapter forms the heart of the research as it focuses on the evolving life of each song. The portrait explores (metaphorical) harmonies and dissonances between creative decisions during the song writing process and the findings of the fieldwork.

Chapter Six sums up findings and presents a reflective discussion on the diverse strands of the research. This includes evaluative analysis of fieldwork design and data generation strategies, and recommendations for future participatory research with young children. The multiple roles I adopted during both creative and fieldwork phases are explored in relation to reflection, relationships and reciprocity, which were recurring themes in the research. This chapter concludes with discussion of implications for practice for early childhood educators, music educators, researchers and song writers, suggestions for future research in relation to children’s songs, and reflections on the significance of the project for a variety of audiences, as well as for me as a researcher and song writer.
The thesis contains several appendices. The songs are presented in three formats: as an illustrated narrative style collection for young children, as an annotated collection for educators, and as audio recordings. These appendices are key parts of the thesis, providing a variety of styles of documenting the research, so that it has relevance for diverse audiences, especially including children. In this way, the objective of employing a participatory approach to children is met even at the stage of thesis presentation.

**Summary**

This chapter has introduced the research, outlining its aims, rationale and methodology. The main aims of the research were to highlight for early childhood and music education researchers and educators the importance of songs as means of social and cultural communication, and secondly to provide insights for song writers into children’s engagement and relationships with songs. The aims were discussed in terms of contributions to academic and professional knowledge as well as in terms of benefits for me and the other participants in the research. The rationale was explained and a brief overview of relevant literature from the fields of early childhood music education, ethnomusicology and sociology given. The chapter also introduced the methodology used – a blend of ethnography, portraiture, practice-led research and participatory research with children. The chapter
concluded with an outline of the structure of the thesis. The following chapter explores the theoretical literature which underpinned this research.
Chapter Two:

Literature review
Overview

This chapter discusses the literature which has informed this study of the processes through which young children incorporate new songs into their existing musical cultures. As this research combines creative work with field work, the theoretical framework which underpins both literature and methodology likewise combines several research disciplines. The literature presents a broad perspective on young children’s music-making (in particular singing), as well as on the creative process of song writing, with a particular focus on social and cultural aspects.

In keeping with portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997), the literature and theories underpinning the research can be understood as a metaphorical ecology (Bromfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The diverse strands are elements of this ecology: the social, cultural and physical environments in which the songs were conceived, developed and shared.

This research portrays one small ecology or culture (a child care community) which is in turn a blend of several other ecologies or cultures (family and neighbourhood cultures, national and international cultures) (Rogoff, 2003). Within each ecology are intertextual and inter-cultural relationships between elements, which are explored in this research. This chapter presents the research literature which underpins the elements of the various ecologies and identifies aspects which are yet to be more fully researched.
Figure 2.1 Ecological elements of theoretical literature

**Ecological elements**

Music psychology, in particular the theory of communicative musicality (CM) (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009), is a key element in this research. It provides a framework for understanding children’s musical responses, viewing them as arising from the fundamental human instinct to communicate with others.

Social, cultural and educational factors are also significant influences on young children’s singing and relationships with songs. Ethnomusicology presents a perspective on the role and function of music in the lives and cultures of individuals and communities. Sociology and socio-cultural theories, in particular the sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2005; Mayall, 2002), underpin exploration of the social nature of children’s music-making. Music education research provides information on the development of music concepts and skills and on pedagogical approaches to young
children’s singing. In particular, early childhood research into reflective pedagogy provides a lens through which to view the roles of all participants in the research processes. These strands of literature represent elements of the ecologies or cultures in which young children sing and make music.

Practice-led research in the arts (Barrett & Bolt, 2007) is similar to much contemporary writing on early childhood pedagogy (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Rinaldi, 2006) in the high value it places on reflection. Reflection is relevant to my role as an artist (song writer and singer) in the research. Further, music therapy research which explores the roles of song writing and singing in communicating and building relationships with young children is also influential. These strands of literature relate closely to the creation and sharing of new songs with young children, hence they represent further ecological elements.

**Communicative musicality**

Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) offer the term communicative musicality (CM) to define the musical characteristics of the vocal interactions of infants and mothers/carers. They cite Blacking’s definition of musicality: “the innate human abilities that make music production and appreciation possible” (Blacking, 1969/95, as cited in Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009, p. 4) and view musicality as the “expression of our human desire for cultural learning, our innate skill for moving, remembering and planning in sympathy with others” (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009, p. 4).
CM is characterised by infant and adult sympathetically synchronising pulse and vocal quality in their interactions as they create shared narratives. Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) extended on their inquiry into infant/mother interactions and that of others (Malloch, 1999/2000; Trevarthen, 2000; Trehub, 2003; Papousek, 1996), by using spectrograph analysis to reveal compelling evidence of synchronised rhythm, pitch, timbre and volume. Their analysis showed that the synchronisation is interactive and is driven as much by the infant as by the adult. They describe it as “melodic and rhythmic co-creativity” (2009, p. 4).

According to Malloch and Trevarthen, “our musicality serves our need for companionship” (2009, p. 6). This statement supports the study of children’s singing in relation to their interactions, relationships and cultures and shows the relevance of CM to such research. Malloch and Trevarthen make a distinction between the CM evident in interactions during infancy and the more common connotations of musicality, as these latter generally relate to consciously constructed abilities and understandings underpinning musical performance. This comes later in life than early childhood, as they point out that it takes experiences in an environment over time for “the learning of culturally conditioned meanings” (2009, p. 2). In this thesis I argue that the instinctive CM identified in infant/adult interactions is still evident in the singing of three to five year olds and is an important indicator of the inherently social nature of their music-making.
Early childhood research into young children’s musical creativity shows that interest in communicating and meaning-making is paramount as children grow (Barrett, 2006; Wright, 2003). This further supports the notion that CM continues to underpin the development of musical skills as children develop. Musical and social experiences combine to lead children to a more conscious and culturally derived musical sympathy with others. This is the level of CM explored in my field research.

Dissanayake (2009) also views the musical perception shown by infants and the musical features of mother/infant communication as indicators of human beings’ innate need for musical expression. She argues that the need for mutuality, evident in these early musical interactions, is possibly at the root of the development of music. She writes of the features of CM as being what may have led to the development of music for communal and ceremonial occasions. Dissanayake’s proposition resonates with research into CM and into the origins of human music-making (Cross, 2003; Cross & Morley, 2009). Given that research has identified in infants’ behaviour a strong instinct for mutuality, and for seeking it in musically co-ordinated ways, it follows that young children’s singing will be inherently social and that children will use their musicality, which began with CM in infancy, to communicate with adults and peers in the same ways: co-ordinating pulse and quality to create shared meaning.

Young children’s instinct for using music as a means of communication is strongly evident in the findings of Barrett (2006). Her longitudinal
ethnographic research identified children’s need to communicate through song and demonstrated that this need is the basis of young children’s musical creativity. Barrett explored the invented song of 40 kindergarten children aged from 4 to 5, over two years. A music area was set up in two classrooms and was freely accessible at certain times of the day. Barrett was a participant observer in each music area and children could interact with her as they chose. She invited them to sing known or invented songs. The children were also offered the opportunity to create music with the instruments available and to write it down. Barrett’s findings in relation to the children’s invented songs indicated that drives for communication, mutuality and meaning-making were central to the children’s musical creativity.

The literature referred to in this section shows that CM is a central element of the ecologies of young children’s music-making and singing. This literature provides strong evidence of humans’ innate musicality being embedded in their fundamental need to communicate. CM, which is generally only considered in relation to research into the musicality of infants, is used in this research as a focus for data analysis and interpretation in exploring the singing of three to five year olds. The narrative portraits presented in Chapters Four and Five explore the CM of the children’s responses in their general music-making as well as in relation to the six songs which are the focus of this thesis.
Cultural and social perspectives

These elements of the ecologies of young children’s music-making relate to culture and relationships. They encompass musical cultures, childhood cultures and relationships between adults and children, as well as between children and their peers.

Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicology is an established research field that contributes examples of methodologies relevant to this research, as well as insights into the role of songs in community cultures. The research design developed and the roles I adopted during fieldwork were based on methods used by ethnomusicologists. Detailed discussion of the literature which informed methodology and research design is presented in Chapter Three.

Ethnomusicology is a discipline that blends musicology and ethnography, studying “music in culture” (Merriam, 1964, p. 7). Ethnomusicologists such as Merriam have predominantly researched the music of non-western cultures, exploring both musical styles and functions in society and culture. In many cultures music incorporates song, dance, drama, story and instrumental music, and plays a central role in everyday life as well as in social and spiritual rituals.

Ethnomusicology has generally focused more on adults’ music than on children’s, with children’s music often seen as a primitive version of adults’ music. One significant exception to this is Blacking’s study of Venda
children’s songs from southern Africa (Blacking, 1967). Blacking was unique among ethnomusicologists of his generation in that he viewed children as a distinct social group worthy of study in their own right. Nettl (1983) is another ethnomusicologist who, following the lead of Blacking, saw the distinctness of children’s songs as being important and worthy of study.

If ethnomusicology claims to study all of the world’s music, it must, in addition to explicating the central repertory and style of a society, make special efforts to understand as well the music of those subdivisions of society that live outside the mainstream, and this includes the musical cultures of .... children (Nettl, 1983, p. 344).

Few music education researchers have adopted an ethnomusicological perspective on children’s music-making. Marsh (2010) and Campbell (1998) have drawn on literature on ethnomusicology in their investigations of children’s musical play and peer cultures outside the classroom, and both provide valuable insights which lend support to considering this perspective and literature. Like Nettl, Marsh and Campbell have identified research gaps in relation to the music of children, which this research will contribute to filling.

In exploring songs in a range of cultures, ethnomusicologist Merriam (1964) discussed the interrelation of music and lyrics in song, pointing out that lyrics will affect the music of a song, as rhythm will be defined by natural patterns of syllables and accents in speech. This is particularly relevant to songs for children, given that young children are developing
their skills and understanding of speech and language, and songs form an important part of their linguistic environment. An analysis of the relationship of speech rhythms to music in the six songs is presented in the gestation stage of the life cycle of the songs in Chapter Five.

Merriam suggested that researchers can glean information about the ethos of a culture by studying song texts. This is an important proposition in relation to children’s songs. Where songs have been created by children, adults can gain valuable insights into children’s social and cultural interests and values. Researchers such as Barrett (2006), Whiteman (2001) and Bjørkvold (1989) have explored children’s spontaneous and invented song, although their research focused more on music than lyrics. Their methods and findings are explored later in this chapter.

Where songs have been written by adults for children, lyrics can reveal implied attitudes towards children and assumptions about their interests and understandings. Exploration of these attitudes and assumptions in song lyrics has not been researched, and this represents a gap in the literature on children’s songs. The scarcity of research on this aspect of children’s songs can be addressed through cross-disciplinary explorations such as the research presented in this thesis. Studying songs and children’s responses to them, through the lenses of sociology, early childhood pedagogy and reflective practice (as a creative artist and an early childhood educator) enables appropriate analytical perspectives to explore implicit attitudes towards children.
In my research I have endeavoured to work collaboratively with children to build understanding of what they are interested in singing about, and to incorporate their ideas into my songs. As a song writer, educator and researcher, I have adopted the position of regarding children as competent, active and creative experts in their own lives (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). This is the philosophy which underpins many current approaches to early childhood pedagogies and research (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Edwards, Gandini & Foreman, 1998; Office of Child Care, NSW, 2006; NZ Ministry of Education, 1996). However most of my songs were created, in the first instance, away from children. In the narrative portrait of the six songs contained in Chapter Five the implicit attitudes towards children which underpin the song lyrics, are explored, drawing on the literature of sociology and early childhood reflective pedagogy (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002).

**Songs as social control**

Merriam’s research into songs in a range of non-western cultures (1964) revealed that songs are often used as a form of social control. They may be used to solve problems, to educate, or to bring communities together. He gives several examples of cultures in which children’s songs are used in this way. Blacking (1967) also found that Venda children’s songs were important teaching tools for children in the community. Some songs were used by adults to educate children; others were used by peers.
Music sociologist De Nora has explored the varied ways that music influences and controls aspects of our lives (2000), for example the use of music to encourage certain moods and behaviours in places such as shops, aeroplanes and gyms. Music is carefully selected for these situations. Tempo, rhythm, instrumentation and harmony are used to elicit desired effects. In some circumstances the influence of music is to encourage entrainment. For example, music which has regular patterns of rhythm, a strong underlying beat and a fairly quick tempo is used for physical activities such as aerobic workouts. This music is typically loud and uses instrumentation and harmony designed to generate feelings of energy so that exercisers are encouraged to keep moving. This can be seen as an example of the use of music as a means of social control.

De Nora points out “music’s semiotic force in social life” (2000, p. 23), but cautions that this should not be viewed as a product of musicological elements in isolation. Semiotic symbolism is created in the processes of experience and interpretation, and is socially and culturally determined. Understanding the semiotic aspects of song is even more complex than the consideration of other musical forms, as musical elements are integrated with verbal language. The emotional effect of music is widely discussed (de Nora, 2000; Reimer, 1970), as it has the ability to collectively influence groups of people even as large as populations. Examples such as national anthems have been cited (Harris & Sandresky, 1985, as cited in de Nora, 2000). These being songs, their emotional influence derives from lyrics.
integrated with melody, harmony, tempo, as well as from the shared social and cultural experiences of singers and listeners.

In contemporary Australia, songs are often used in early childhood centres as a means of social control, aimed at teaching children about appropriate behaviour. Many centres have a song for tidying up toys, a song for hand washing or for sun protection procedures, and songs for greetings and farewells. Merriam (1964) also describes instances of adult songs in some cultures which were created to deal with sensitive social issues where direct spoken communication would have been difficult or inappropriate.

In early childhood settings songs are sometimes used to convey messages about sensitive issues such as feelings, friendship or sharing (Campbell & Scott Kassner, 2010). Such songs can certainly be more valuable for achieving social conformity than other forms of communication with children. Anecdotal evidence from my own experience as an early childhood educator, widely supported by those of other educators, shows that the use of songs for routines and transitions is very effective (Deiner, 2010). These songs are often playful, and children participate with enthusiasm while co-operatively carrying out the desired behaviour conveyed through the song lyrics.

De Nora speaks of music helping to organise us (2000). Music is itself organised into patterns of rhythm, tonal and harmonic progressions and phrases. This is even more strongly evident in songs, in which the linguistic
patterns of rhyme and metre, verse and chorus, are integrated with the musical patterns. When a song is used with children to elicit a certain behaviour, such as in transitions during the daily routine in an education setting, the children become familiar with the patterns of the song and organise themselves to synchronise with these patterns. Lyrics which convey meaning positively and simply, combined with music which feels lively and cheerful, serve also to enhance the children’s disposition to behave in expected, socially appropriate ways. Transition songs serve to encourage a social, communal response, so that the children feel a sense of belonging with peers and staff as they move together to tidy up, wash hands or sit down for story time.

This phenomenon supports one of the aims of this research – to highlight the ways in which children engage in songs as forms of social and cultural communication and meaning-making. Although the examples given above refer to songs created by adults to guide or control the behaviour of children in relation to social and cultural norms, my fieldwork yielded many examples of children using songs to elicit their desired social behaviour from their peers. This use of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005) of social cultures is explored later in this chapter, in the literature on the sociology of childhood.

The question of whether songs reflect, or contribute to, creating culture is an issue on which ethnomusicologists are divided. Nettl’s view is that songs and music generally, reflect culture (1983). In contrast, researchers in early
childhood such as Corsaro (2005) believe that children actively create their cultures. These differing perspectives must be viewed in the light of each researcher’s definition of culture. This conundrum is a focus of Chapter Four, in which the relationship between children’s musical and social cultures is explored through a narrative portrait of the metaphorical ecology of the field setting.

One ethnomusicologist who has addressed the issue of whether music creates, or is created by, culture is Mark Slobin (1993). He argues that music serves both functions. Slobin has broadened the traditional focus of ethnomusicology by studying the musics of many Western cultures, reminding us that we can use principles of ethnomusicological research to explore the music within our own cultures, rather than always focusing on the musical ‘other’. Slobin views culture in broader terms than ethnically or geographically defined cultures, pointing out that cultures overlap and interweave, and that in the contemporary globalised world people belong to a variety of cultures simultaneously. Where previously anthropologists and ethnomusicologists may have been able to identify unique cultures and describe these as the products of accumulated knowledge and life experiences within distinct communities, today such delineations are rarely possible. This cultural blending and integration is certainly true in relation to children. Slobin therefore defines cultures more in terms of relationships than rules, a perspective which is very relevant to researching the musical culture of an early childhood setting.
Slobin (1993) used ethnographic research methods in a range of cultural situations in USA and Europe to explore the intersections and blending of cultures in the contemporary world. He categorised several levels of cultures, terming them super-cultures, sub-cultures, inter-cultures and micro-cultures. In relation to young children’s songs, super-culture can be seen as a global view of contemporary mass media-driven popular musical culture. It also relates to the popular musical culture of contemporary Australia. Sub-culture can be seen as children’s musical cultures within this defined super-culture. The musical cultures of the children and staff at the field site in this research can then be defined as a micro-culture, but also an inter-culture, as the influences of community musical cultures blend with global cultures and childhood cultures. The intersections of different cultures in the musical lives of the children at this site, Schubert Road Child Care Centre, are explored in the narrative portrait in Chapter Four.

Nettl (1983) has identified the existence of separate music for children in many European cultures as well as in the indigenous cultures of China, Japan, Arab countries and Australia. This music is different to adult music. Sometimes it is merely simpler (narrow pitch range and simple tonality), shorter and more repetitive. In other cases it is quite stylistically different from adult music. There have been some theories about the differences, such as those of Kartomi (1980) who relates them to differences in children’s interests and priorities.
The existence of defined children’s music in societies such as that of contemporary Australia is an example of music following culture (Nettl, 1983). Children’s popular music in our culture is similar in style to adult popular music. As with adult pop music, it is primarily song. The musical styles and instrumentation of the most popular recently produced recorded music for children are derived from pop and rock genres. The main differences between adults’ and children’s songs lie in length and lyric content.

CDs and DVDs of children’s songs, using electronic instruments and visual imagery that are stylistically similar to adult music videos, are produced and heavily marketed to children. This form of musical commodity, purchased by adults for children, is widely popular amongst children under five. Such music is often adjunct to a TV series, and children are exposed to it in a variety of the media they meet every day. Hence young children’s musical experiences and tastes are heavily influenced by electronic media and adult pop culture. These recordings (audio and video) are regularly shared with children in most early childhood centres in Australia, including the field site for this research. The influence of these recordings is explored in Chapter Four.
Music education perspectives

There are varied theoretical approaches to young children’s musical development which are influenced by research (Campbell & Scott Kassner, 2010). In my work as an educator I have not been bound by any single approach but have aimed to be well-informed and open minded, and to develop musical interactions based on my observations of children. As a trained and experienced music educator, my knowledge of musical development influences my song writing and musical interactions with children.

It is inevitable that observations of children and interpretations of them will be influenced by a body of theoretical knowledge. Just as environmental factors affect the balance of an eco-system, so research and theoretical orientation affect the practices and content of music education. Knowledge of music education theories and research likewise influenced the songs I wrote during this research, as well as interpretation of data.

Welch (2002) provides an overview of young children’s musical development gleaned from a wide range of research perspectives. His summary supports an ecological perspective on children’s music-making because it encompasses music in terms of life and culture, as well as in terms of education and development. Welch analyses our perception of and responses to three main aspects of music. These are “psycho-acoustic features” - pitch, dynamics, duration and timbre; “structures” - patterns of form, such as similarities, differences, repetition; and “syntactic and
communicative elements” - aspects of musical sound which form similar functions to language (2002, p. 114). He also refers to the emotional effects that music has on us.

According to Welch, we respond to music in the following ways: perception, cognition, emotion and behaviour. He describes the musical behaviour of both children and adults as being influenced by “basic biological potential, maturation, experience, opportunity, interest, education, family, peers, and socio-cultural context” (2002, p. 114). Other researchers such as Custodero (2006) also highlight the role of family and community in the musical development of young children. In the research presented in this thesis data is analysed and interpreted in relation to a number of these influences.

In discussing the role of singing in musical development, Welch (2002) points out that songs have been a central part of human music-making throughout history. Historical researchers have identified similarities between contemporary song structures and those dating back as far as 1400B.C. He suggests that these features relate to both socio-cultural and biological factors which influence our responses to songs. For example, commonalities in melodic contour and structure have been found in comparisons of lullabies across cultures, again pointing to the likelihood of universal musical responses being partly based on biological/neurological human functions.
Welch and others (Papousek, 1996) focus on parallels between speech and musical development during infancy, which could relate to the role of both as communication tools. Research on young children’s singing development encompasses several theoretical models such as those of Davidson (1994) and Rutkowski (1996). These researchers and others have found that there is a wide range of singing abilities during the early childhood years. Their findings seem to indicate that musical environments and experiences, particularly in the home, are highly influential in terms of the rate of children’s singing development (Gordon, 1997; Custodero, 2006).

A significant contribution to broader understanding of children’s singing was made by Bjørkvold (1989), whose research traversed the disciplinary boundaries of music education, child development and ethnomusicology. At a time when most investigation of young children’s singing focused on classroom behavioural research, he used ecological theories to explore children’s singing in the context of their play and child cultures in several countries: Norway, USA and Russia. Bjørkvold used ethnographic research methods, spending extended time in early childhood settings as a participant observer, to gather data. He analysed the children’s singing from a musicological perspective, but also from a socio-cultural perspective.

Bjørkvold (1989) likened young children’s singing to ngoma (an African word for music-making which is interactive and incorporates dance, drama and story). His research resonates with my findings in a previous study
Niland, 2005) which highlighted children’s playful responses to songs. The recognition that children play with songs accounts for their multi modal totality of engagement – vocal, physical, linguistic, cognitive, and emotional. Bjørkvold saw singing as having a functional purpose for young children as they make meaning of their world and develop their self and cultural identity.

Bjørkvold’s (1989) ecological exploration of children’s singing was an important influence on others researching young children’s musicality in the late 20th century. In relation to my research, Bjørkvold’s analysis provides a rationale for the exploration of children’s communication and social interactions as they build relationships with new songs.

**Sociology perspectives**

**Peer social cultures**

Contemporary thinking in sociology, developmental psychology and early childhood pedagogy is underpinned by the recognition that interaction and culture are central to children’s development. The socio-cultural theory developed by Vygotsky (1978) was a driving influence in these current perspectives. Vygotsky argued that children learn collaboratively through interaction and relationships with family, adults such as teachers, and peers. The influence of more competent adults or peers can allow children to function at a higher level than they are capable of independently, which moves their development forward.
Vygotsky also stressed the value of play in providing opportunities through symbolic interaction for children to enter what he termed a ‘zone of proximal development’. According to Vygotsky, language is a powerful influence on children’s cognitive development, hence language-based play with peers (including singing) is an important part of early childhood. The aspects of Vygotsky’s theories which are especially relevant to this research are the importance of peer relationships and play in children’s lives and development, and the key role of language in advancing children’s thinking.

In contemporary urbanised societies such as Australia young children spend a lot of time in community settings with other children of similar ages. In these settings children actively construct their cultures and identities together with their peers (Corsaro, 2005). Corsaro, a sociology researcher who has extensively researched young children’s peer cultures, poses a new conceptualisation of childhood. His research shows that young children’s peer cultures do not just reflect adult cultures, but are created by children through a process he terms interpretive reproduction. Children use knowledge gleaned from their experiences and through this they construct new understandings together, thus contributing to building their own cultures.

Corsaro’s (2005) theory of interpretive reproduction provides a way to interpret the social interactions which are central to young children’s singing. Building on Bjørkvold’s (1989) analysis of singing as a form of play, an inherently social activity for pre-school aged children, Corsaro’s
perspective highlights the function of Bjørkvold’s ngoma. Through playful singing together, young children are exploring their world and constructing their childhood peer cultures. Corsaro defines peer cultures as “a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values and concerns that children produce and share in interactions with peers” (2000, p. 92).

Corsaro identifies concerns with autonomy and power, as well as the negotiations involved in sharing this power, as being key themes in young children’s peer cultures. Corsaro’s methods and research findings have provided important underpinnings for my research. In Chapter Three his use of ethnography, and the role he adopted in working to ensure young children’s perspectives were authentically represented, are discussed further.

The commodification of children’s musical cultures

Young children’s lives are significantly influenced by the ubiquity of electronic media (Christakis, 2009; Lee, Bartolic & Vandewater, 2009). The average Australian pre-school aged child spends at least two and a half hours every day viewing TV programs and DVDs at home (Pitman, 2008). Children may also spend some time each day watching DVDs in early childhood centres. Many watch DVDs on portable players while travelling in cars or eating in restaurants with their families. Increasingly, early childhood classrooms have computers with simple games available for children. Recorded music is often playing in the background in homes, child care centres, cars and shopping centres. It is not uncommon for young
children to play games or watch DVDs in miniature on their parents’ mobile phones. Therefore digital media is strongly evident and influential in young children’s peer and musical cultures.

The content, musical and general, of this media is common to many children across the world, although it may incorporate translation into local community languages. Overwhelmingly the content, musical and general, originates from English speaking cultures, notably from USA or UK. Exceptions to this are the children’s music groups The Wiggles and Hi-Five, who are Australian. Interestingly, the former have now been franchised, so that there are Japanese, Taiwanese and Spanish Wiggles.

The commodification of children’s cultures is visually obvious through the merchandise which is part of most children’s lives in Australian communities. Clothes, shoes, bags, drink bottles, lunch boxes, pencils, toys, books and more, all bear the trademarked images of popular music groups and TV or movie characters. These products, which are often of great importance to children, tend to reinforce the music they relate to. Barrett describes such items as “reminders of the legitimating force of the electronic media in shaping what it is to be a child” (2003b, p. 196).

Children use this music and its associated commodities to create their musical identities and cultures (Barrett, 2003b). Barrett, like Corsaro and Bjørkvold, argues that children are active agents in the processes of creating
their cultures. It is important for researchers of early childhood music to seek to understand the role of musical commodities in children’s lives.

The songs which children experience from widely marketed CDs and DVDs can be defined as music for children (Barrett, 2003a). Barrett proposes that there are distinct differences between music for children, music by children and music with children. While the songs children create (music by children) show many similarities to the music with which they are most familiar, children are much more engaged with exploring diverse elements of music when creating their own songs or collaborating in song making with a musical adult (music by or with children) (Barrett, 2003a; Bjørkvold, 1989; Whiteman, 2001).

Barrett (2003a) emphasises the importance of music by and with children for developing musicality. In analysing the musical cultures of the children during fieldwork, I found that music for children, heavily influenced by mass market, music-linked commodities, was very evident in the children’s lives. Barrett’s three categories of children’s music provided an important lens through which to interpret field data, as well as a new perspective on my objectives as a song writer. In order for my songs to be of most interest and relevance for children, they should have the potential for making music with children rather than simply being songs for children.

The influence of musical commodities and popular adult musical culture on young children’s singing, and hence on their musical development, is an
area with much research potential. The pervasiveness of these aspects of culture in the musical lives of young children demands consideration from both early childhood and music educators. Musical commodities are commonly found in early childhood classrooms in Australia and the values which underpin the use of these commodities should be considered by early childhood and music educators. Because of its focus on the cultural and social contexts of young children’s singing, the research presented in this thesis contributes to understanding of the role of musical commodities in the lives of young children.

**Early childhood perspectives: Reflective pedagogy**

My role as a researcher was influenced by current approaches to early childhood pedagogy, in particular reflective pedagogy (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Parlakin, 2001). Reflection was a tool used in writing songs, in singing with children, and in data generation during fieldwork. Reflective field notes were influenced by my training and experience as an early childhood educator, and by my knowledge of research into current approaches to curriculum. Contemporary early childhood curricula in many nations are based on a view of children as competent and resourceful beings who learn collaboratively with peers and supportive adults in a community of learners (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; NZ Ministry of Education, 1996). Reflective practice, including shared reflection with children, is seen as an essential tool in working with young children.
Reflective practice involves reflection in action and reflection on action (Schön, 1983). These two types of reflection form part of both ethnography and participatory research with young children. Working with young children as a temporary member of a community during the ongoing life of a child care centre can be unpredictable. Therefore the research will not always go according to plan (Mayall, 2002). Reflection in the midst of action is necessary in order to generate data. Reflection on action between visits is also necessary, so that data is interpreted and decisions made in the light of those interpretations influence the future directions of data generation.

Shared reflection with research participants in the field (children and staff), also evident in other contemporary research approaches, is similar to the practice of encouraging children to revisit their learning in order to extend and deepen their experiences and their thinking (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). In early childhood research this form of reflection has been shown to lead to positive outcomes for children in terms of learning and the development of positive dispositions (Claxton & Carr, 2004; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Shared reflection was a tool used in the fieldwork phase of this research to interpret data as well as to make ongoing decisions about approaches to data generation (Clark & Moss, 2001). Proponents of reflective pedagogy in early childhood argue that educators who adopt these approaches are in fact engaged in a continual process of research with children (Fleet, Patterson & Robertson, 2006). The use of reflective strategies and perspectives derived from early
childhood research related to all the multiple roles I adopted during the research processes – researcher, educator, musician and song writer.

**Songs and singing**

**Creative arts perspectives: Song writer as researcher**

Reflection is a valuable tool of the creative artist (Barrett, 2007a), who uses it in similar ways to an early childhood educator. The artist engages in cycles of reflection at every stage of her creative processes, using prior knowledge and experience to evaluate her unfolding creation. She makes judgements based on her knowledge of her intended audience, on relevant research literature, on her anticipated outcomes, and on her own aesthetic and emotional responses. She moves in and out of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) as she goes from being absorbed in creating to standing back to evaluate and make judgements which will influence the next stage of the process (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007). This cycle of reflection, influenced by experience, theory and research, characterises the act of creating art (songs) as research praxis (Barrett & Bolt, 2007). Creative arts researchers who have elucidated these theories are therefore especially relevant to the song writing stages of this research: the conception and gestation stages of the life cycles of the six songs.

**Early childhood perspectives: Singing and play**

Children’s innate desire to communicate and make meaning with others is tied up with their innate musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009;
Bjørkvold, 1989; Dissanayake, 2009). Therefore young children’s use of songs, both the ones they have learned from others and the ones they invent, is inherently social. Exploration of the ways in which their musical expression and social interactions are integrated is the purpose of this research. However up until approximately the last ten years research into children’s singing has rarely focused on social aspects. Most research into young children’s singing has focused on the musical aspects of their singing behaviour, viewed in terms of its implication for their musical development. This is why the work of Bjørkvold (1989), is so significant.

Another researcher who acknowledges the importance of the social function of singing is Whiteman (2001), who undertook a longitudinal study of the spontaneous singing of eight pre-schoolers over three years. Whiteman’s aim was to explore the musical knowledge and skills shown in the children’s singing, a goal not dissimilar to many earlier studies of young children’s singing. However Whiteman’s perspective was unique and valuable in that he also set out to explore the social nature and interactive influences on the children’s spontaneous singing.

His research was influenced by early childhood reflective pedagogy in that he focused on singing in the context of play and through his interpretation of data was able to highlight children’s competence in creating their own learning through social play. Whiteman’s research (2001) effectively linked research in music education with research in early childhood pedagogy.
Whiteman (2001) built on Bjørkvold’s (1989) analysis of the function of spontaneous singing. He identified three main ways in which young children used singing: to communicate with others, to accompany their play or simply to sing for the enjoyment of it. He found that seven of the eight children he studied overwhelmingly used singing for the first two functions. Whiteman’s findings point to the need for further research into children’s singing with a focus on social aspects. They provide valuable interpretive information for the research presented in this thesis. This research to some extent builds on Whiteman’s foundations in that it draws on some of the same literature that he used to develop a theoretical framework, such as that of Corsaro (2005) and Bjørkvold (1989). The research also addresses some aspects apart from those explored by Whiteman, such as the use of participatory methods in working with children, and the incorporation of socio-cultural and music therapy perspectives.

**Music therapy perspectives: songs and well-being**

The central role of songs in human music-making generally, and in the lives of young children in particular, can be understood through the theory of CM, as already established. The use of song writing in music therapy provides further evidence of the importance of songs in children’s lives.

Song writing is used as a therapeutic intervention with child and adult clients in a variety of therapy situations, such as psychiatric care, hospitalisation, palliative care and disability settings. Therapists report on its therapeutic effectiveness and recognise its value as lying both in the
process of shared song writing and in the ongoing use of the resultant songs by clients, their families and friends (Baker, Wigram, Stott & McFerran, 2009). The online survey research undertaken by Baker et al., to find out how music therapists used song writing, involved nearly 500 participants from 40 nations. This large scale study confirmed, and extended upon, the findings of several smaller studies in establishing that song writing is widely used (by 88% of participants) and highly valued. The researchers gathered data on the therapeutic goals and outcomes of song writing as well as on the techniques used to create music and lyrics with clients.

Music therapists use song writing to work towards a range of goals. Baker, Wigram, Stott and McFerran (2008) found that the expression of thoughts or emotions, the enhancement of self-esteem and the clarification of experience are three of the most common across all therapy settings. These findings are significant for my research as they point to the role of songs as means of communication and meaning-making. They also indicate that songs play a role in the formation of identity and social relationships.

According to Baker et al. (2008), one of the significant outcomes of song writing for many therapists was the fact that songs written during therapy often had a positive long term therapeutic effect. Songs were written down and/or recorded and were sung and listened to for a long time after they were created. Data revealed that clients, as well as people close to them, developed strong relationships with the songs and that the songs became a part of their lives.
Favourite songs often have a similar role in the lives of young children, in both family and early childhood settings. The relationships between songs and singers are inextricably bound up with the relationships between children and their peers and/or family members. Therefore research findings on the processes and outcomes of song writing in music therapy support the rationale and theoretical framework of my research.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature that informed my research. It was presented from an ecological perspective (Bromfenbrenner, 1977; McKown, 2005), complementing the use of a life cycle metaphor as a narrative technique to trace the development of the lives of new songs. Just as the development of living things is influenced by environmental factors, so the life span development of my songs was influenced by environmental factors. The literature discussed underpins these factors. The innate musicality of young children, established through the research into communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) is a particularly significant influence. As music can be both a creator and a reflector of culture, ethnomusicology literature is a part of the ecology. The ecology is also influenced by approaches to early childhood and music education; therefore literature from these two fields of pedagogy was included. Children’s songs and singing are part of the social and cultural lives of children, therefore literature on the sociology of childhood, especially the theory of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005), was also discussed. The
next chapter reviews the literature which underpinned the methodology and discusses the design of the research.
Chapter Three: Methodology and Design
Overview

This chapter has two sections. The first extends on the review of literature in the previous chapter by discussing the literature that underpinned the methodology and influenced the research design. The second presents more specific details of the design: both the researching of the processes of song writing and the fieldwork.

The first section begins with a critical discussion of methodology used in past music education research into children’s singing. This is followed by an exploration of a diverse but complementary range of approaches, and an explanation of the rationale for the use of a blend of these in this research. Disciplines drawn on include ethnomusicology, sociology, creative arts and early childhood. The methodological approach developed employs a blend of techniques derived from ethnography, portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997), practice-led research (Barrett & Bolt, 2007) and participatory approaches to research with children. The first section concludes with discussion of the issues of ethics and validity.

The second section describes the methods used to research my practice as a song writer, and as an ethnographer in the field. Information is presented on the field site and participants, the diverse roles of the researcher in the field, ethical permissions and strategies, as well as approaches used for data generation, data analysis and validity.
Part One - Methodology

Research methods in early childhood music education

The main focus of research in early childhood music education until approximately 2003 was on investigating children’s musical behaviours, utilising both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. In general children were viewed as individuals, and research design and analysis were based on developmental perspectives of theorists such as Piaget. Many studies involved quasi–experimental designs such as pre-test, intervention, post-test research (Apfelstadt, 1984; Cooper, 1992; Flowers & Dunne-Sousa, 1990; Goetze, 1989). Samples were usually small and based on convenience. For example, class groups were used and studies were often conducted over short periods of time such as one school term. These studies focused on particular behavioural outcomes with little or no consideration of contexts. This individualist developmental focus typified early childhood research of the same time period. Children’s music-making was explored in relation to the development of musical skills and understanding, and in the contribution these made to laying down foundations for future formal musical learning. This body of music education research has underpinned my training and experience as a music educator, and therefore influences my decisions as a song writer. However just as current approaches to early childhood research and pedagogy have embraced broader, socio-cultural perspectives, so the field research presented in this thesis draws more on socio-cultural theories, as well as on music education research into
children’s musical identities within peer groups and communities. These major research influences have been discussed in the previous chapter.

**Theoretical framework**

**Ethnography**

The dominant methodology of this research is ethnography. Journal notes were kept as songs were composed, and the fieldwork phase involved temporary membership of an early childhood community and the adoption of the role of participant observer for an extended period of time. The design of this phase of the research is described in detail later in this chapter.

Ethnography suited both the creative and fieldwork phases of this research. The stories of the life cycles of original songs must begin with their creation. This in turn begins with the story of the song writer. My song writing is a product of inner creative thought processes, which are influenced by life experiences and knowledge: professional, cultural and personal. Therefore the narrative portrait of the songs contains elements of auto-ethnography. This approach enabled portrayal of the lived experience of writing songs in relation to my professional self (early childhood educator, musician and researcher) and placement of the songs within the social and cultural contexts of the fieldwork setting (Reed-Danahay, 2009).
Ethnography was an appropriate methodology because this research also involved an exploration of the general role of music and songs in the everyday life and culture of an early childhood setting. Ethnographic research is aimed at increasing understanding of aspects of human functioning within a particular community and culture (Van Maanen, 2002). It involves a researcher spending extended periods of time as a temporary member of a particular community, where she participates in activities of the community and conducts interviews or conversations. “Ethnographic research is guided as much from drift as design” (Van Maanen, 2002, p. 102). The ethnographer must be flexible to fit in with the normal functioning of the community, and should engage in constant reflection in relation to her role, her interactions and the aims of the research. In order to understand the developing life cycles of my new songs, extended periods of time would be needed, to observe and participate in the community of an early childhood centre.

Ethnography is chiefly based on participant observation. Data mainly comprises field notes, interviews (recordings and transcriptions) and often artefacts and/or photos. According to Van Maanen, “this approach allows the fieldworker to use the culture of the setting [the socially acquired and shared knowledge available to the participants or members of the setting] to account for the observed patterns of human activity.” (2002, p. 102). Data may be analysed by searching for patterns and relationships. Van Maanen describes the data as being comprised of “first order concepts”, that is information provided by participants, which is then used to form “second
order concepts”, that is the interpretation of data by the researcher in relation to theory (Van Maanen, 2002, p. 103).

An important strength of ethnography is that it can yield richer and more in-depth data than can be generated through techniques such as surveys or one-off interviews where the researcher is a short-term visitor to the community (Chambers, 2002). Indeed this is one of its key features (Geertz, 1973). Richness is achieved partly because the length of time spent in the community allows trusting and open relationships to develop between researcher and participants (Chambers, 2002). Ethnography also provides rich data because of its focus on naturalistic context, so that the complexities of behaviour, interactions and thoughts of participants in relation to the culture of their community are more deeply explored.

Geertz speaks of the essence of ethnography as “thick description”, a phrase he attributes to Ryle (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). The long term relationships involved in ethnographic research are necessary, according to Geertz, so that the researcher can become immersed in the community and gather rich and complex data to build understanding of that community’s life and culture. He describes anthropological data as “our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (1973, p. 9) and holds similar view to Van Manen. Geertz states that “anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones ... [By definition only a “native” makes first order ones: it’s his culture]. They are thus fictions” (1973, p. 15). The implication of
Geertz’s statement is that data cannot be viewed as objective truth and researchers must always be aware of the interpretive lenses they use to make sense of them and to communicate findings to others. Geertz’s statements support the use of research methodologies which work collaboratively with participants, aiming to allow their perspectives to be presented. In relation to children, this means viewing them as capable of communicating their ideas and seeking to involve them actively in all aspects of the research process.

Researchers in anthropology and ethnomusicology now acknowledge that the researcher will inevitably leave traces of herself in the field (Barz and Cooley, 2008), and that her own perspectives during the research must be recognised and analysed. This shadow (Cooley & Barz, 2008) or footprint highlights the social and ethical responsibility of a researcher, so that she should acknowledge the impact of her presence during the study. A socially and ethically responsible researcher will need to consider what she can give to the field in recognition of what the members of that field or community have given her. A researcher grows professionally and personally through engaging in research. Therefore reciprocity should be acknowledged as part of the research process (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001). This concept was an important aspect of fieldwork in my research, and is analysed in Chapter Six.

Contemporary researchers adopting qualitative approaches such as ethnography are urged to aim not for objectivity but for reflexivity. The
importance of a reflective approach, where the researcher continually analyses her interactions in the field in conjunction with the data generated, is also stressed by researchers undertaking participatory research with children (Christensen & James, 2000; Clark & Moss, 2005; Jenks, 2000).

Reflexivity and reflection are highly valued in contemporary approaches to early childhood pedagogy such as that used in the preschools of Reggio Emilia in Italy (Rinaldi, 2006). Reflexivity in this context applies to educators, researchers and children. Revisiting conversations and artefacts such as artworks, recordings or photos with children is an important way to develop understanding and knowledge. Children and adults reflect together, using documentation, which may be visual, textual or auditory. In this approach, strong relationships and communication are at the heart of both education and research. Reflexivity is a common thread that links ethnography, participatory research and early childhood pedagogy, as well as practice-led research in the creative arts, making it central to this research.

Ethnography is particularly appropriate for research involving young children because it allows sufficient time for researcher and participants to get to know each other, and for the researcher to build understanding of the cultural contexts as well as of the participants. It also allows time for the generation of data using a range of communication strategies. This is valuable in research involving young children, whose verbal skills, as well as their interests, differ from those of adults. Data generation techniques
that are appropriate for children, involving a range of different media and styles of communication, will often lead to more time being needed for research than when conventional techniques are used. The resulting data will more richly reflect the views of children and the complexities of the cultural context of the setting (Clark & Moss, 2005; Darbyshire, Schiller & MacDougall, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2005).

In contemporary approaches to ethnography which aim to work collaboratively with participants so that their perspectives are explored and conveyed, traditional power relationships between researcher and researched are challenged (Mayall, 2000). In recent years early childhood and education researchers, seeking to gain deeper understanding of children, increasingly employ methodologies which allow children to work together with the researcher to ask questions and design data generation techniques (Graue and Walsh, 1998; Christensen and James, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2005; O’Kane, 2000; Pole, 2007). This involves research participants working with the researcher in reflecting on, and interpreting data. Such collaborative research is not limited to ethnographic studies, but the approach lends itself well to ethnography, because an ethnographic researcher spending large amounts of time in a community strives to develop trusting relationships with community members. Working in consultative partnerships can be an effective way to develop such relationships, which will maximise the potential for participants’ ‘voices’ to be heard (Holt, 2004) through the generation of rich data.
Collaborative approaches to research that challenge the traditional roles and relationships of researcher and participants have developed out of the social science tradition where research is used to advocate for social change (Christensen & James, 2000). This is also true of much contemporary early childhood and educational research which seeks to highlight the rights and perspectives of children. Such research aims, through giving children some power and control in the research process, to work towards giving them a greater say in the way their education and care is conducted (Clark & Moss, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). In early childhood, this research is an extension of contemporary approaches to pedagogy that stress the socio-cultural foundations of learning (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) and conceptualise educators and children as co-constructors of learning communities (Curtis & Carter, 2008; Rinaldi, 2006). This view of children and of the learning process has rarely been part of the theoretical framework of music education research. As an early childhood educator I would argue that socio-cultural and reflective pedagogy theories will provide a new perspective from which to view young children’s music-making.

An ethnographer who has sought to understand young children’s perspectives on their social worlds and peer cultures is William Corsaro, whose theory of interpretive reproduction is discussed in the previous chapter (Corsaro, 2005). As a researcher he adapted the techniques of ethnography for use in researching with children. Corsaro spent long periods of time as a member of early childhood communities in the USA
and Italy and adopted a reactive role as a participant observer. His detailed analytical narratives of pre-school children’s interactions provide wonderful insights into children’s social cultures through outstanding use of thick description (Corsaro, 2005; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000).

Corsaro’s approach is based on the ‘new’ sociology of childhood, viewing children as ‘beings rather than becomings’ (Qvortrup, 1994, as cited in Dockett, Einarsdottir & Perry, 2009, p. 284) and as active producers of their own cultures (Corsaro, 2005). His view of children corresponds with the philosophy which underpins the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). This document, to which Australia is a signatory, recognises that children are capable of holding and expressing their own opinions. It also recognises that children have a right to be part of decision-making in areas of life which affect them, such as in relation to their musical experiences, in educational settings and in their everyday lives.

**Participatory research with children**

Children’s perspectives cannot necessarily be gleaned from data collected and interpreted by adults. “The meanings that [children] attach to their experience are not necessarily the meanings that their teachers or parents would ascribe; the subcultures that children inhabit in classrooms and schools are not always visible or accessible to adults” (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000, p. 61). Increasingly researchers are recognising the rights of children to express their ideas and opinions and to have an active role in research and decision-making in relation to aspects of their lives. In social science
research this recognition has led to a growing body of research aimed at advocating for many forms of social and political change based on consideration of children’s perspectives on aspects of their lives (Christensen, 2004). Many stress the need to differentiate between carrying out research on children (traditional approaches) and research with children (Christensen and James, 2000; Pole, 2007).

As James (1995, as cited in O’Kane, 2000, p. 139) points out, the way children are viewed will have an important influence on the conduct of research with them. According to James, regarding children as actively social, in keeping with the new sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2005), identifies them as having unique social skills, different but not inferior to those of adults. This is the view of children which frames the research presented in this thesis. Working within that frame, I endeavoured to build collaborative relationships with the children at the field site, to devise data generation techniques which would engage their interests, meet their diverse communication needs and which were in keeping with the social and musical cultures of the research setting.

Participatory approaches to research with children involve attention to many of the same issues as those pertinent to ethnography. One such issue is the relationship between the researcher and the permanent members of the community. Just as a white-skinned European researcher cannot blend in to an African village, so an adult cannot blend in with a group of young
children. Therefore inter-generational issues must be acknowledged and addressed in the research methodology (Mayall, 2000).

Mayall (2000) believes that because childhood is a social construction which is ordered according to adult views, those who wish to research with children need to consider issues related to generation (that is, differences between adults’ and children’s lives). In other words we need to be reflective about our presumptions and perspectives on children, their lives, their interests and their attitudes. In considering generational issues, according to Mayall we must first start by confronting the fact that the adult as researcher implies a position of superior knowledge, which is of course how adults generally relate to children. Interestingly, many current approaches to early childhood pedagogy, such as those inspired by Malaguzzi and Rinaldi from the Reggio Emilia region of northern Italy, also challenge this generational stance in relation to the role of the teacher (Edwards, Gandini & Foreman, 1998). The idea of a community of learners (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), where adults and children are co-constructors of learning, is in fact a reflection of the same questioning of the old order as are the views of researchers who seek to work with children as collaborative participants in the research process.

Mayall states that “good information about childhood must start from children’s experience” (2000, p. 121). She points out that in order to gain quality data the adults and children involved in the research must be as much as possible on equal footings in terms of power relationships. In this
way, adults can to a reasonable extent be accepted by children as part of the social grouping. However to achieve this an adult must be prepared to relinquish power, and must also find ways for children to see that they can have power and that this does not automatically lie with the adult in every situation.

A role which is often adopted by adults researching with children is one described as a least adult role (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Mandell, 1991). In this role the researcher allows the children to take the lead in interactions with her as much as possible. She waits for the children to invite her into their play or conversations, and leaves them to control the agenda of their interactions. She views the children as being the experts in the setting as they are the permanent ‘residents’, whereas the researcher is a visitor. The adoption of this role involves the researcher in maintaining some differences between her relationships with the children and those between the children and the centre staff. Therefore the researcher should, where practically and ethically possible, avoid adopting roles or behaviours usually associated with the educators in the setting. In this way the researcher attempts to minimise the unequal power relationships which may typify staff/child relationships in early childhood educational settings.

Flexibility is an important consideration in researching with children. When adults and children are working together as research collaborators, the adult must be open to changing her methods during the process, in order to work with the children’s ideas about the project. Mayall (2000) describes how
she has often worked in a sort of halfway position between researching on children and researching with children. This position means that the children contribute to planning methods of data generation, and of course to generating data, but the aims of the research have been set by the adult researcher, not by the children. Mayall expresses her position like this: “I am asking children, directly, to help me, an adult, to understand childhood”. (2000, p. 122).

Mayall (2000) advocates the use of conversations rather than interviews as a means of collecting data. She sees them as being valuable because they allow children to take control of the dialogue, its pace and its direction, thus fitting in with the concept of the least adult role (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Mandell, 1991). She also sees conversation as important because it is a means through which children explore and learn about many aspects of their world. This is another example of pedagogical philosophy and research philosophy running in parallel, as many contemporary early childhood curricula stresses the value of talking and listening for children’s learning (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; NSW DOCS, 2006; NZ Ministry of Education, 1998).

Rinaldi speaks of the importance of creating a culture of listening (Rinaldi, 1999 as cited in Clark & Moss, 2001) in early childhood educational settings. This approach to listening is also central to the Mosaic approach to researching with children set out by Clark and Moss (2001). Mayall points out that through taking part in conversations with children and
analysing them, researchers can learn a lot more about children than just what is relevant to the topic of conversation (such as songs). This approach enables understanding of children’s ways of socialising, thinking, listening and speaking to be built.

Conducting research with children as collaborators presents the researcher with many ethical challenges, due to the physical dependencies and unequal power relationships which typify adult/child roles in our society (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). Christensen and Prout (2002) propose a pathway through these challenges which they term ‘ethical symmetry’. Their approach is predicated on the researcher adopting “equality as his or her starting point” (2002, p. 484). They are not suggesting that children will necessarily have equal power with the researcher, but that researchers need to view children as having rights in the process which are equal to those of adult research participants. This implies the need to provide children with broad information about the research aims and questions, rather than just specific instructions about their role in data generation. It also implies the need to consult children about data generation strategies, to seek ongoing assent to participation and to reflect with children on all aspects of the research process. The methods the researcher uses may not be the same as those used with adults; however the intent of full disclosure and active participation will be the same.

In developing methodology for data collection or data “generation” (Graue and Walsh, 1998, p. 91) in this research, a synthesis of approaches which
involve children as active participants was used. One of the approaches from which techniques and strategies were adapted was the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001). The developers of this stress the use of a variety of sources of data, so that children’s perspectives can be as richly presented as possible. This has been supported by others as being a key to carrying out research which is most appropriate for children (Pole, 2007; O’Kane, 2000). An important principle of research with children is to provide them with a range of options for communicating (verbal, pictorial, observational, social) and a choice of situations which will empower them to become active participants in data generation.

There are many reasons why a range of data generation techniques are necessary when researching with children. Although contemporary conceptions of childhood often view the child as competent and resourceful (Curtis & Carter, 2008; Office Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Office of Child Care NSW, 2006), a young child’s verbal communication is different from that of an adult and is still developing. It is important for researchers who are questioning children to check the meaning children take from their questions. Children are often eager to tell their stories or give their opinions, which can lead to them answering questions they may not fully understand. For example, children may interpret questions more literally than they were intended, and their verbal responses may not always show the thinking processes which underpin them (Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). To address such challenges in this emerging research paradigm, researchers have used pictures, objects or artefacts as stimuli for interviews,
to assist in conveying questions to young children (Clark & Moss, 2005; Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). However Dockrell, Lewis and Lindsay warn that these items need to be carefully chosen so that they do not reflect stereotypes or in any way serve to limit or control children’s responses.

O’Kane (2000) similarly points out that children may understand things and communicate about things differently to adults. She, like Mayall (2000), refers to the biggest problem often being the differences in power and status between children and adults. O’Kane recommends that researchers work towards “creating space which enables children to speak up and be heard” (2000, p. 137). The perspectives and research strategies presented by these researchers are in direct contrast to viewing children as objects of research. Consideration of power dynamics in adult/child relationships during research is thus important. These issues were challenging in my fieldwork and are explored in later chapters.

Children may also communicate different aspects of their thoughts and interests in diverse situations (Clark & Moss, 2001). Provision of opportunities to communicate through play with peers, puppets, toys, songs, musical instruments or drawing, encourages children’s expression in a variety of ways. This diverse range of strategies and resources also aims to meet young children’s need for physical and sensory engagement with experiences, and to maintain their interest in participation.
Principles and strategies gleaned from the literature on participatory research with children significantly shaped the design of the fieldwork phase of this research. A least adult role (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Mandell, 1991) was chosen, and children’s opinions on approaches to sharing songs were actively sought. Their verbal assent was requested for any interaction, particularly if a form of recording was to take place. A range of different strategies and media were used to generate data with the children, and data records, especially digital forms, were shared with them. More specific details of methods used are provided in the Part Two of this chapter. The many challenges faced in implementing participatory approaches with the children are discussed and analysed in Chapters Five and Six.

Creative arts research

The two phases of this research – song writing and fieldwork - have been brought together by the use of methodological approaches drawn from investigative approaches to creative arts research known as Arts Based Educational Research (ABER) (Barone, 1995; Barone, 2000; Piantanida, McMahon & Garman, 2003) and practice-led research (Barrett & Bolt, 2007). ABER focuses on research as a creative process, and on the educator and researcher as an artist. Barone and Eisner describe arts-based research as possessing “the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 73). They see arts-based research as having the following characteristics: “expressive
language, ambiguity, creation of virtual worlds, empathy and the imprint of the writer” (Taylor, Wilder & Helms, 2007, p. 8).

Given that the art of song writing is central to this research, the reflective and aesthetic approaches of an artist were also used in investigation and presentation of outcomes. ABER researchers aim to present their research outcomes in ways that are accessible and engaging for a wider audience than the traditional academic community. This has informed the approach used in this thesis, to ensure that the research is accessible and relevant for early childhood educators, music educators and young children. While the thesis format overall conforms to the requirements of Higher Degree Research, some sections of the thesis have been constructed to address this imperative accessibility for audiences beyond academia.

This research also has many of the characteristics of practice-led research (Barrett & Bolt, 2007), a methodology which aims to explore the processes of art making as praxis, a combination of action and theory, through which new knowledge can be generated. Practice-led research draws on the features and strategies of qualitative research, but seeks to reconceptualise many aspects of both processes and outcomes in ways that relate closely to relevant art forms. The main implication for this research is that my songs form a central core element of methodology and outcomes.

Practice-led research systematically explores and analyses the reflective processes of the artist (in this case, song writer). According to Barrett
(2007a), an artist can be regarded as a researcher, in that she reflects on and reviews her processes, bringing other knowledge to her work, much as a researcher surveys the literature, and gathers data in the field. Practice-led research, through its reflective exploration of the processes of art making, lets others in on those processes, which can lead to increased understanding of the nature of artistic practices.

Creative arts researchers using both ABER and practice-led methodologies seek to explore and celebrate the subjective role of the artist researcher. They suggest that this necessitates a reconceptualisation of the researcher’s role (Barrett, 2007a; Slattery, 2003). The recognition of the artist researcher as a reflective practitioner provides a perspective which allows for both acknowledgement of the inherent subjectivity of artistic practice and systematic exploration of this.

For practice-led researchers, the challenge is to find ways to “give a voice to the artefact” (Mäkelä, 2007, p. 157). In this research the use of a life cycle metaphor was adopted with the aim of achieving this. A methodological approach which blended theory and practice, or praxis (Goddard, 2007; Vaughan, 2009) was used, and the unfolding life cycles of the six songs spanned the two phases of the research.

**Portraiture**

To emphasise this research as praxis and in keeping with its cross disciplinary nature, the techniques of a social science narrative approach
known as portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) were used in writing this thesis. This methodology aims to break down the barriers between art and science which exist in traditional approaches to research. Portraiture, which has much in common with ABER and practice-led research, is a form of narrative inquiry combining the rigours of research with the aesthetic features of the arts. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot, portraiture aims to “capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (1997, p. 3).

The role of the researcher in portraiture is conceptually divergent from the traditional researcher role. The researcher is termed the portraitist – one who uses words to paint a portrait. As with a painter, her portraits will reflect personal skills, values, knowledge and experience, and her relationship with the subject[s] of the portrait[s]. The portraitist highlights the phenomenological nature of this form of research, through exploration of personal subjective experience of the phenomenon being studied (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) speak of the portraitist putting aspects of the self into the portraits. As the creator of the songs at the heart of this research, I am both researcher and researched, a situation akin to the convention of the visual artist who incorporates her own face or body in a group portrait.
A key feature of portraiture that is especially appropriate for the purposes of this research is the inclusion of the multiple and diverse perspectives of all research participants. Portraiture respects and values the role of all partners in the project - especially important where children are involved. As outlined earlier, qualitative research in many disciplines recognises the importance of including the perspectives of children (Darbyshire, Schiller & MacDougall, 2005). Portraiture also has many similarities to the Mosaic approach of Clark and Moss (2001), in that both seek multiple perspectives, and use a visual arts metaphor to describe their respective approaches.

Portraiture has features in common with contemporary ethnographic approaches employed by ethnomusicologists. Barz and Cooley (1997), for example, stress the importance of recognizing the role and influence of the researcher as a participant in the field she is researching. They call this the researcher’s shadow, and like Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997), support the postmodern view that reflexivity rather than objectivity is an integral and valuable part of the research process. Barz (1997) in particular, acknowledges, as do the proponents of portraiture, the importance of writing as a research tool, not just to record, but also as a means of developing thinking and understanding. During the fieldwork phase of this research, which explores lived experience and relationships in an early childhood community, it was important to focus on developing skills in creative writing. Reflective writing was a critical tool used in interpreting data and sharing it with children, staff and families, to involve them in further reflection and interpretation. This writing needed to be
engaging for these participants, and to be clear so that they felt their experiences and ideas were authentically represented. Effective writing was a valuable tool in the generation of rich ethnographic data.

Research questions

The formulation of research questions was informed by gaps in the literature on young children’s songs and singing. They were particularly aimed at using a socio-cultural framework to explore the lives of the six songs in the context of a social and cultural setting. The questions were developed to integrate the two aspects of the research through focussing on processes and relationships. They allowed investigation of the creative processes of song writing as well as of children’s responses to the songs in the field setting.

Main question:

- How do new songs become part of young children’s musical cultures?

Secondary questions:

- How can the musical culture of the early childhood educational setting be defined?
- How does this musical culture influence the children’s engagement with new songs?
• How do social interactions, peer relationships, home culture and gender influence children’s relationships with new songs?

• What aspects of the new songs composed by the researcher/song writer are most engaging for children?

**Research approach**

This research encompasses creative work and fieldwork, presented in an integrated form as a narrative portrait. The use of portraiture enabled the combination of reflective data on song writing processes with ethnographic field data generated at the field site. In this way the life cycles of six original songs are explored. The design of the fieldwork phase is explained below.

**Selection of field research site and participants**

Having decided that an ethnographic approach would yield useful data, a field site was needed: an early childhood education centre where I would be welcomed as a temporary community member over at least six months. The intention was to find a centre in which staff regularly sang with children, and hopefully one where the staff included confident and tuneful singers.

As a higher degree research candidate at the University of Western Sydney I selected a field site in the region of the university. This region is on the outskirts of Sydney, and includes many areas of low socio-economic stratum. Several UWS early childhood lecturers were at that time involved
in developing research projects with a local government body in the area who administer a group of early childhood centres, and whose Children’s Services Manager was interested in forming partnerships with UWS to support quality early childhood education. This manager was approached to find a site for fieldwork.

Communication with her about the research led to a decision to focus on interest in singing and willingness to participate rather than on staff’s perceived musical skills. This decision was made so that staff would not feel that their musical abilities would be judged, as this could jeopardise the development of relaxed and trusting relationships, an essential aspect of ethnography. It was also specified that involvement in the research would be voluntary. A centre whose staff members were willing to participate was found, and this site and the participants are described in the next chapter.

**Development of data generation strategies**

Following the principles of ethnography, data generation techniques that would be unobtrusive were needed. This was a priority for two reasons. Firstly, it would enable me to function as a researcher with minimal disruption to the normal routines of the child care centre. Secondly, it would enable me to conduct field research within the existing cultural practices and relationships of the centre. Therefore the techniques and materials used should be similar to those used by staff in the implementation and documentation of their curriculum. The decisions made and implemented are discussed further in Part Two of this chapter.
Ethics

This research was assessed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Western Sydney (HREC) (approval number H6979). All families at the centre received letters explaining the research, and all signed permission forms for their children to take part. Children who were interested and could write their names signed the forms as well.

Data analysis

In ethnographic research data analysis is ongoing during fieldwork, rather than taking place after data generation is complete, or between stages of data generation. Regular revisiting and reflection during the data generation phase of the research form an essential part of this reflexive approach. Reflection on data strategies is combined with reviewing of data so that strategies can be modified as relationships develop. This ensures that the researcher is functioning appropriately as a temporary member of the community.

Data is analysed for emerging themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997), a process similar to the qualitative research technique of coding (Flick, 2009). This ongoing approach to analysis enables the researcher to enter the field each time with a reflective perspective. She can be sensitive to emerging patterns and themes once she has identified them in previous data, as well as looking for contradictions and/or further themes. The researcher can also consider whether data generation strategies used so
far offer the most potential for exploring these themes further, or whether some modifications to strategies may be more productive.

Ongoing data analysis allows the research story to unfold gradually, as stories unfold in life, or as an artist paints a portrait over time. Awareness of the directions the narratives are taking during the data generation process can assist the researcher/portraitist to create her narrative portraits with coherence and resonance (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). The concepts of coherence and resonance contribute to the validity of the research, and are discussed further in Part Two.

Validity
Validity may be defined as credibility or ‘believability’ (Polkinghorne, 2007). It is essential in all research, regardless of methodology. In qualitative approaches such as ethnography or narrative research, it is less tangible than in relation to quantitative methodologies. In this section validity is defined in relation to narrative research, and strategies which address validity issues are outlined.

Research can be deemed to be valid when “sufficient evidence and/or reasons” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 474) are provided. The key implication of this is that validity depends upon the perspectives of the research audience. The researcher/author must convince them, through the provision of sufficient evidence and reasoned argument, that her story and conclusions are valid. In relation to portraiture, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) believes
that validity provokes a “click of recognition” (1997, p. 247) response from the reader – a strong sense of identification with evidence and findings presented in a narrative research portrait. She terms this resonance and cites Maxwell (1996), who believes that research audiences must feel a sense of trust in the research.

Achieving resonance is a key aim of portraiture. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis view it as an effective blend of creativity and intellectual rigour, which evokes in the audience positive aesthetic, cognitive and emotional responses. The creation of a research portrait is similar to weaving a tapestry, in that strong structural elements underpin the artistic creation and the resultant believable, artistic and interesting story/image. Lawrence-Lightfoot defines the tapestry as having four dimensions (1997 pp. 247-255).

The first she terms “Conception”, the broad narrative. She sees the portraitist as creating a thread of focus which drives the narrative. Sometimes this can involve a form of “repetitive refrain”. The thread or threads are provided by themes which resonate through the narrative. Conception “is expressed through repetition, reflection, reiteration” and that these are further reinforced by “contrasts” (1997, p. 247).

The second dimension is “Structure”, which incorporates a framework that may also include “sequencing and layering” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 247). These are likened to the “warp and weft of the weaving” (1997, p.
Structure grounds and organises the narrative. Whereas in a novel, narrative structure is often hidden (like the framework of a building), in a research portrait the structure is mostly evident through the use of metaphors and headings/subheadings which relate to themes.

The third dimension is “Form”, which relates to structure, but is more fluid. Although form may be less obvious than structure, it is nevertheless still important. Structure and form work together to create interest and bring the narrative portrait to life. Lawrence-Lightfoot sees it as “texture of intellect, emotion, and aesthetics that supports, illuminates, and animates the structural elements.” (1997, p. 254). The use of imagery, small story moments, illustrations, photos are all contributors to form.

The fourth dimension is “Cohesion”. Lawrence-Lightfoot describes this as the “unity and integrity” (1997, p. 247) of the whole, the “orderly, logical, and aesthetically consistent relation of parts” (1997, p. 255). The successful creation of conception, structure and form will lead to cohesion. A cohesive narrative is also created when the researcher/portraitist’s voice is clear and consistent. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis assert that the use of these dimensions or elements will assist in maximising the validity of portraiture research.

One of the main threats to validity arises from researcher bias (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Quantitative researchers implement many strategies in their design and methods to minimise this. However qualitative researchers
now recognise that it is impossible to completely eliminate bias, and that in fact the perspectives of the researcher can add depth and strength to research. This is an inherent feature of narrative research in general (Chase, 2005; Richardson, 2003), and portraiture in particular. The portraitist, working in similar ways to a visual artist, will create her portraits in a particular style, which is creatively unique to her, and this style is derived from her life experiences and from the interactions she has with research participants, the subjects of the portraits.

One of the ways that validity can be addressed in relation to researcher bias is to share data with participants, so that their perspectives can be elicited at several stages during the research process/ the creation of narrative portraits (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This strategy is also recommended when seeking to research with children, so that their perspectives are more authentically represented. Similarly, in reflective approaches to early childhood pedagogy (Rinaldi, 2006; Fleet, Patterson & Robertson, 2006; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), educators are encouraged to engage in shared reflection on pedagogical documentation of learning with children.

A further strategy which can address the issue of researcher bias and can strengthen validity is to generate data in a range of ways or from a range of sources. Qualitative researchers refer to this as triangulation (Flick, 2009). In relation to researching with young children, Clark and Moss term this a mosaic approach (2001). Contemporary qualitative researchers such as practice-led researchers describe this as bricolage (Kincheloe, 2005;
Stewart, 2007; Vaughan, 2009), a concept in keeping with postmodern approaches to research:

bricolage highlights the relationship between a researcher’s ways of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history. Appreciating research as a power-driven act, the researcher-as-bricoleur abandons the quest for some naïve concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of his or her position in the web of reality (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 324).

Therefore a variety of data generation and interpretation strategies were employed during the fieldwork phase of this research which both highlighted and explored the specific social contexts and perspectives of all research participants. These are explained below.
Part Two – Design

This section focuses on contextualising the broad information on methodology given above, for the specific situation of this research. It begins with an overview of methods used in researching the writing of the six songs, outlining journaling procedures with reference to supporting literature from a range of research disciplines. It continues with the provision of the details of the research design and methods used in the fieldwork at Schubert Road Child Care Centre.

Investigating the processes of song writing

Reinders (1992), who undertook a phenomenological study of the creative behaviours of creative artists (including painters, choreographers and composers), found that these artists had a distinctly artistic view of parts of their world which led to a “sense of lack” (as cited in Nelson & Rawlings, 2007, p. 221), a sort of gap which the artists felt the need to fill. This finding sums up my own experience as a writer of songs for young children. The sense of a gap to fill arises in relation to my identities as both early childhood educator and song writer. Therefore investigation of the processes of the writing of the six songs is an essential part of the story of the songs. The conception and gestation stages of the life cycles of the six songs explore the identification of gaps, my motivation to fill them and the development of ideas as the songs were created.
Practice-led research involves systematic documentation and analysis of the creation of a work of art (Barrett, 2007b). It also necessarily involves analysis of the thoughts, ideas and perspective of the artist. In this research, the metaphor of a life cycle provides a structure for systematic data generation and analysis of my creative processes. The narrative portrait contained in Chapter Five incorporates aspects of auto-ethnography as well as portraiture, as it “places personal experience within social and cultural contexts” (Reed-Danahay, 2009, p. 28). Auto-ethnography, portraiture and practice-led research have many similarities, as all position the researcher within the research rather than as an objective outsider. Perhaps the most significant similarity is the centrality of reflection in all three methodologies. As an artist (song writer) and an ethnographic researcher, reflection was ongoing part during the creation of the songs. My reflections as an artist were also inseparable from my reflections as an early childhood educator, which is evident in the narrative portrait in Chapter Five.

In their study of the creative processes of artists, Nelson and Rawlings (2007) found that the artists alternated between intuitive and analytical ways of working. Bursts of creative flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) were interspersed with periods of reflection, in which the artists’ knowledge and experience were used to consider their work from an outsider’s perspective, in order to analyse and refine the work of art. Nelson and Rawlings’ description of these phases resonates with my experience of song writing. This is evident in the conception and gestation sections of the life cycles of the six songs portrayed in Chapter Five.
**Field research**

**The site – Schubert Road Child Care Centre**

Fieldwork took place at a long day care centre in a lower middle class suburb approximately 50 kilometres west of the centre of Sydney. A pseudonym conceptually similar to its real name has been assigned. The centre takes its name from the street in which it is situated, and coincidentally the street is named after a composer. The Schubert Road Child Care Centre is local government owned and managed, and is situated in a quiet residential area. It was purpose-built for child care, and is well maintained and equipped. The centre has two play rooms, the Rainbow room for children aged less than three years, and the Eager Beavers room for children aged from three to five years. Each day there are 25 children in the Eager Beavers group and 12 children in the Rainbow group. Children from the Eager Beavers room were the official participants in the field research.

**Time period of fieldwork**

Data were generated over eight months, from July 2009 to April 2010, during which time I visited the centre twice weekly from July to December and once each week from February to April. There were two breaks of several weeks during the fieldwork, in September and January. On each visit I arrived between 9 and 10am and stayed until mid-afternoon. This length of time enabled in depth exploration of the lived experiences of children and staff members as they engaged with the six songs, and as the songs over time became embedded in the centre’s musical culture.
During visits I interacted with children during free play, routine times such as meals, and structured group times. I adopted a reactive, least adult role as much as possible, waiting for children to interact with me, and allowing them to lead our interactions. If invited, I joined in their play. Children quite often requested to play my guitar or djembe, which meant that many of our interactions were musical. However I also read stories, dug deep holes in sand, built block structures, assisted with puzzles, poured drinks and tied shoe laces. Through engaging in a diverse range of interactions with the children, we got to know each other well and developed friendly relationships.

**Participants**

The participants at the research site represented a small sample – approximately 30 children in the Eager Beavers group. There were 25 children present each day, but about 30 across the two visiting days in the first five months of fieldwork. About 20 children attended both days, so that I saw them twice each week. There were two full-time staff members who were generally present when I was, a part-time staff member whom I saw once each week, and several part-time or casual staff members with whom I interacted from time to time.

As the school year commences in late January in Australia, over half of the children who attended the centre for the first six months of fieldwork started school at that time. Therefore in the last three months of visits I interacted with children who had either been younger members of the Eager
Beavers group the previous year, or former members of the Rainbow group. These latter children were familiar with me as they had often hovered around during my interactions during outdoor play time. In the final three months of fieldwork there were also a few children new to the centre. While at Schubert Road Child Care Centre I spent time in the Rainbow room every few weeks to sing nursery rhymes and other favourite songs with the infants and toddlers, as it seemed appropriate for all the children at the centre to have the opportunity for some extra singing. This meant that some of the children who moved to the Eager Beavers room in February 2010 had sung with me before, although they had not been introduced to the six songs which were the focus of data generation.

![Diagram of research participants]

**Figure 3.1** Research participants

Each of the participant groups listed in the diagram above had diverse perspectives to be drawn out. The use of portraiture, with children as research collaborators, incorporating multiple voices and perspectives, enabled exploration of the different relationships between the various participants, and exploration of the role that the six songs played in these relationships.
| Song writer/ Singer/ Researcher | • Writing songs  
• Singing with children  
• Participating in the early childhood community of research site |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Children                       | • Singing and interacting with songs  
• Interacting with researcher  
• Playing and interacting throughout the day |
| Staff                          | • Observing children’s singing  
• Participating in singing  
• Interacting with children |

**Table 3.1 Research participants and data generation**

**Researcher**

I adopted several roles in this research. During the song-writing phase my role was simultaneously that of researcher and researched (du Preez, 2008). During the fieldwork phase I was predominantly a participant observer (Macionis & Plummer, 2005), a temporary member of the community of the early childhood centre. My participation in the life of the centre included the role of musician. In this role my musical interactions with the children were strongly influenced by knowledge and experience of the role of an early childhood educator. Singing interactions were also influenced by my role as creator of many of the songs we sang. Therefore I was again functioning as researcher and researched. These multiple identities were combined during the research process. Both reflection on, and interpretation of, data were influenced by each aspect of the multiple identities as well as by the knowledge of research literature relevant to each identity.
Ethics in the field

During fieldwork at Schubert Road Child Care Centre the principles of ethical symmetry were followed (Christensen & Prout, 2002). The adoption of a least adult role also formed part of the ethical approach. Because during free play times I waited for children to come to me, the children were always choosing whether or not to engage in singing, other music-making or conversation. Therefore their assent or lack thereof was implied in their choices in relation to interacting with me. I always asked their permission to photograph, video record or audio record and respected their decision to participate or move away. Children often asked to take photos and were allowed to do this. I would explain what I was hoping to put in a photo so that they could follow this, but I also allowed them to take their own photos, following their own intentions.

During whole group sing-alongs which were structured into the daily routine, the children’s presence was required by the staff. This presented me with an ethical dilemma, dealt with by the adoption of a non-teacher style of interaction as much as possible. In particular, I refrained from giving any verbal instructions to participate to those who chose not to focus on me or on singing. I focused my attention on the children who chose to join in with the songs I was leading. This strategy was mostly successful, except that on some occasions staff intervened to give behavioural instructions, as they felt it was important for the children to show politeness to an adult leading a group session.
Data generation in the field – settling in phase

Ethnographic research depends on the researcher building trusting relationships with members of the community in which she is researching. Therefore time was spent in the first few weeks at the centre focusing mainly on getting to know children, staff, routines and other aspects of the community culture. This period also allowed time for gathering impressions of the centre’s musical cultures, for beginning some trial data generation procedures, and for stimulating children’s interest in the research. I took what Corsaro (2005) terms a ‘reactive’ approach to interacting with the children, as described earlier. During the settling in phase I engaged with the children in a variety of play and routine situations as well as occasions of singing, in order to build relationships.

In any research project participants must give informed consent before becoming involved. In research involving children, a parent or adult guardian provides this consent. In keeping with the principles of ethical symmetry (Christensen & Prout, 2002), I intended to explain my research to the children, and to verbally seek their assent to participation. However this did not proceed quite as envisaged, mainly because the children showed very little curiosity about the research, although they showed considerable interest in my songs and my musical instruments. In anticipation of questions from the children, and in line with ethical symmetry, I had planned the following answer to the children’s enquiries as to why I was at their centre: “I’m here to find out about what songs you sing and what you think about them. I’m also here to share my songs with you.”
Although some plans were also made in relation to data generation strategies (see above and table 3.1), I intended to be open to finding out what the children might think about ways to explore their singing. I was prepared to ask children about this as a direct question after explaining my research: “What do think are the best ways for me to find those things out?” However these plans did not eventuate as I had imagined, due to the children’s lack of curiosity about my presence, and their willingness to accept and welcome me regardless.

In adopting a reactive and least adult role, I intended to avoid taking on what the children would most likely view as ‘teacher’ roles and duties. I would join in with routines such as tidying up and would follow general centre rules and procedures; however I would allow staff to take the lead in interacting with the children in relation to routine procedures and behavioural guidance. As visits progressed, it became evident that these approaches were not always appropriate and that it was often not possible to respond in the ways planned. Issues in relation to this aspect of my role are explored in Chapters Five and Six.

Initial interactions during the settling in phase would clearly be important in establishing roles and relationships for the duration of the fieldwork. With this in mind, I worked carefully to establish relationships which allowed the children to have as much power as possible (Mayall, 2000). Daily written notes were used to reflect on interactions and children’s responses and to analyse these with particular focus on the balance of power. This was an
important exercise, as it was necessary to be very flexible in the field situation (van Maanen, 2002) but also to set goals and plan strategies.

One of the aims in pursuing a participatory approach to researching with the children was to use artefacts relevant to the six songs as data generation and reflection tools (Clark & Moss, 2001). I intended to use photos, recordings, drawing and perhaps toys to stimulate the children’s interest in the songs and in reflective conversations about them. Situations encountered during fieldwork, however, led to the realisation that some prior ideas needed to change. Artefacts were very important, but the form these took varied, and the decisions made came out of interactions with children and staff, and early interpretations of data. This aspect of the field research was strongly influenced by reflective practice principles from early childhood pedagogy (Fleet, Patterson & Robertson, 2006; Clark & Moss, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006).

At the centre I quickly became recognised as a singing person, and as the creator of many of the songs I sang with the children. This happened partly because of an evening meeting held with staff to introduce the research and my songs. At this meeting an audio CD of my original songs was given to the staff of the Eager Beavers room. This enabled them to select the songs they felt the children would be most likely to engage with, and to learn some songs and sing them with the children before field visits began.

My identity also derived mainly from my singing, because from week two I led sing-along sessions at group times, and brought a guitar or a djembe for
the children to use with me whenever they liked. During free play times I waited for children to initiate interest in singing, as planned. An instrument was used partly to attract their interest in joining me, and partly to convey the idea that my purpose at the centre was musical.

**Trialling data generation strategies**

During the settling in phase, a range of data generation strategies were trialled and field notes used to reflect on the effectiveness of these. The sharing of research questions through conversations with children and staff had been planned, as described above, however this did not eventuate. While staff members were welcoming, friendly and accommodating towards me, they were also very busy. Shortage of permanent staff, supervision of practicum students from university and TAFE, preparations for graduation and Christmas celebrations, all served to keep staff focused on other priorities. Given that an ethnographic approach to the research had been chosen, I was intent on causing minimum disruption to the normal functioning of the Eager Beavers room.

During the first two weeks of fieldwork, audio recording equipment was trialled to ascertain its best use and to work out any technological limitations. A voice recorder and still camera were used to take audio recordings, photos and short MPEG clips. A video camera was used to record group sessions. I operated the camera when a staff member was leading the group, or gave the camera to another adult when I led the group. As envisaged, the children were quite comfortable with this as cameras are
used regularly by staff members. It was intended that children would be allowed to use the camera where possible. This was discussed with staff, who were happy for that to happen, although they didn’t generally do it themselves. Children did often take photos with my camera; however the photos they took were mostly not relevant to singing or to my songs. The children’s and staff’s responses to the use of a video camera differed from their responses to still cameras. Video recording was regarded as more of a record of performance, possibly because the outcome was viewed on a TV screen. Therefore children were less relaxed when video recordings were made.

As the children were to be to some extent co-researchers, it was hoped that they might show an interest in collaborating in the creation of new songs. Children’s interest in creating spontaneous songs is widely documented (Barrett, 2006; Whiteman, 2001). The children’s awareness that I had written many of the songs we were singing together did in fact lead to some children deciding to create songs themselves. Instances of this are described in Chapters Four and Five. Some children also showed interest in collaborating with me on writing new songs. This is explored in Chapter Five.

**Data generation in the field - Main phase**

As the study proceeded, reflective notes on data generated from field notes and digital records (audio, photo and video) were written after each day spent at the centre. Some data were documented for staff and families of the
centre, so that they became part of the centre’s curriculum records. Some data were presented on DVD for sharing with the children, as a way of stimulating reflective conversations. Some data were also shared with children in the form of song books, using their photos or clip art with the song lyrics. These books were used as a tool for reflective conversations and as a stimulus for informal singing of the songs. Some of this material was displayed for families throughout the project, so that they could follow the unfolding story of the research.

**Figure 3.2** Extract from documentation for families
The children’s voices

The range of data generation techniques used in fieldwork was particularly aimed at ensuring the perspectives of the children would be authentically represented. This was a great challenge. The use of multiple styles and sources of data collection, in keeping with portraiture and the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001), was crucial. I found, just as other researchers had, that a combination of strategies such as “conversational interviews, oral and written journals, drawings, reflections and digital photographs” (Dockett & Perry, 2005, p. 507) was helpful in gaining valuable research data. However there is a “distance between a desire to...
listen carefully to young children and involve them in worthwhile research and the ability to do this in the messy world of practice and real live children” (Darbyshire, Schiller & MacDougall, 2005, p. 468). The challenges in working in collaborative ways to conduct research with children in this field setting are explored in the portrait in Chapters Four and Five and analysed further in Chapter Six.

**Analysing data in the field**

During fieldwork, data were transcribed and collated weekly, and excerpts presented in a child-friendly format for children, staff and families to share (see figure 3.3 above). This enabled me and the children to revisit data and reflect upon it together. In this way data were analysed continuously during my time at the centre, so that recurrent themes were identified and decisions affecting data generation were ongoing. Through regular displays, representative parts of data analysis were shared with children, staff and families.

For the purposes of analysis, field data were organised both chronologically and by song, so that the stages of each song’s life cycle could be identified and analysed. Tables were prepared, identifying the technique used to generate data, thereby analysing the role and value of different data sources and data generation situations (audio recording, observation/field notes, photography, video, conversations, structured group times, indoor play, outdoor play, parent or staff conversations). This is a technique of analysis used by Moss and Clark (2001), which shows very clearly the richness and
diversity of perspectives gained through the use of multiple sources of data (see table 6.1 in Chapter Six).

**Life cycle metaphor**

The metaphorical framework of the research encompassed the following stages in the life cycle of each song:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conception</td>
<td>The original idea for each song, its origins and rationale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestation</td>
<td>The creation of music and lyrics, processes and rationale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>The initial sharing of the song with children and adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Singers’ initial engagement with the song as they become familiar with the melody and lyrics of the song.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>The song becomes well-known singers begin to take ownership and play with the song, perhaps adapting or extending it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>The song becomes an on-going part of the musical culture of the early childhood setting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.2** Life cycle metaphor for interpretation and analysis of data

Data analysis, undertaken reflectively both during and after the field research, was used to create narrative portraits of the life cycle of each song, which tell the story of the development of dynamic relationships between songs and singers. These portraits were used to create an overarching portrait of the life cycle of six songs, which is presented in Chapter Five.
Figure 3.4 Research process

**Researcher/ portraitist**

Just as the methodological approach used in this research drew on a range of techniques, so the role of researcher had many facets, all of which were linked by the thread of reflective practice: song writer, singer, early childhood educator, ethnographic researcher and portraitist. These multiple roles are portrayed in Chapter Five and the ways they influenced the processes and outcomes of the research are analysed in Chapter Six.

Figure 3.5 Reflective processes
Establishing validity

For the purposes of this research, validity has been defined chiefly in relation to authenticity and credibility (Polkinghorne, 2007), as discussed in Part One of this chapter. Triangulation was attempted (Flick, 2009), in keeping with qualitative research traditions. The use of ethnography and participatory approaches to working with the children led to the adoption of a variety of data generation techniques. These resulted in generation of data from a range of sources and in a range of formats. Data were shared with children, staff and families and opportunities provided for shared reflection and interpretation.

Validity was also addressed through interpretation of data in relation to the criteria set out by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997), as set out in Part One of this chapter. Resonance was aimed at through the use of portraiture, so that the story of the research was brought to life in a manner which encouraged aesthetic engagement and trust in that story. Analysis and discussion of the efficacy of the portraits in achieving validity is set out in Chapter Six.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological approach and design of the research. Literature underpinning the methodology was reviewed and details of the field research site and participants were presented. The research methodology and design drew on a range of traditions, relevant to
the research aims. These included ethnography, sociology, early childhood and creative arts. A reflective perspective was employed in all aspects of the research. This facilitated the building of strong relationships through and with the six songs, as well as the sharing of reciprocal benefits from and with the research participants.

The next two chapters use portraiture to present and interpret the research data. Chapter Four explores the musical cultures of the children and staff in the Eager Beavers group, the main cultural context into which the six songs were introduced. Chapter Five contains a narrative portrait of the life cycles of the six songs within the musical culture of the children of the Eager Beavers group at Schubert Road Child Care Centre.
Chapter Four:

Portrait of a musical culture
Overview

This chapter presents a narrative portrait of the musical culture of the Eager Beavers Room at Schubert Road Child Care Centre. The portrait has been drawn from observations, field notes, conversations, artefacts, videos and audio recordings. It integrates my perspectives with those of the children and adults at the centre. The portrait incorporates narrative, interpretive reflections and relevant literature. This literature derives from ethnomusicology, sociology, music psychology (communicative musicality, CM), music education and early childhood. An understanding of the musical culture of the research site enabled pursuit of the aim of investigating the processes through which new songs become part of an existing musical culture. This chapter provides a portrait of the context into which the six songs at the heart of this research were introduced.

Setting and subjects

Schubert Road Child Care Centre

The playrooms at Schubert Road Child Care Centre have a friendly feel. They are well lit, cool, but not overly large, and are painted in light, bright colours. Children’s art work, posters, photos and programming documentation can be seen on the walls and hanging from exposed beams below the high ceilings. Both the Eager Beavers and Rainbow rooms are rectangular, with windows at one end and glass doors to the verandah at the other.
The verandah is a spacious covered area at the back of the building, accessible from both playrooms, and opening onto the outdoor play area. It has a beautiful view of the centre’s outdoor play area, the neighbouring park and the primary school beyond. The centre is on a small hill, so that nearby mountains can be seen in the distance. A variety of play areas are set up on the verandah each day. These vary according to interests, and can include areas for art, reading, construction, music, dance and gross motor play.

The outdoor play area is extremely large, so that children never feel crowded. There is sufficient space to run and ride bikes safely. Several very large trees and many smaller shrubs provide areas of shade. The area has flat and sloping sections, some grass, pathways, a big sand pit and soft fall with fixed play equipment. The latter two areas are covered by large sun shades. There is a wooden stepped deck area near the verandah surrounded by shady trees. Side by side slides and wide wooden stairs are set into a grassy hill. The centre’s washing line is near one fence and beside this a steep slope had been turned into a flower, herb and vegetable garden. This little garden was planted out by the children and they help to weed and water it. Children from the Rainbow and Eager Beavers groups play together outdoors.

During fieldwork outdoor play time was always very relaxed and happy. With so much space and such a range of play options the children were usually deeply engaged while outdoors. However weather is a challenge for
the centre, due to its aspect in relation to the sun and the extreme climate of the outer western suburbs of Sydney. During winter the children can only be outdoors during the middle part of the day, as it is cold and damp in the mornings and late afternoons. During summer it is often so hot that the children need to be indoors after 10am for the remainder of the day. Indoors is air conditioned so the temperature is always comfortable.

The climate significantly influenced my spontaneous interactions with the children during free play periods. Weather conditions meant that much of my data was generated during indoor play times. Indoor time was often noisy and crowded, with many children moving around in a small area, making the atmosphere less conducive to relaxed or focused interactions. In contrast, interactions with the children on the verandah or outdoors often lasted longer and were more relaxed, so that reflective conversations were more likely to occur. Some indoor times during afternoon rest time were also more reflective, as during this time the room was slightly darkened and this was designated ‘quiet time’ by the staff, so that some children could sleep. Rest time was when we often chatted while sharing song sheets or quietly watched videos of data.

**Children and staff of the Eager Beavers room**

During fieldwork at Schubert Road Child Care Centre, from July 2009 to April 2010, I developed strong relationships with many of the children in the Eager Beavers group. These relationships and those between the children and my original songs are at the core of the portrait presented in
this chapter. Therefore it is appropriate to present background profiles of the children who feature most frequently. This group represents about half of those present in the Eager Beavers group on field visit days. All names are pseudonyms. The profiles present only a partial picture of each child, as they focus on information relevant to the child’s relationships at the centre and their responses to the six songs. Some basic facts are included in relation to physical attributes and family background; however more precise demographic information is beyond the scope of this research.

**Graduating group**

The children in this group were all approximately five years old at the start of field visits, except for Jason and Rochelle. The graduating group left at the end of 2009, approximately six months after field visits commenced.

**Ethan** was fairly tall, of medium build, with short brown hair and brown eyes. He had attended Schubert Road Children’s Centre since infancy, so was very confident in the community of the centre. He lived with his grandparents and had no siblings. Ethan enjoyed talking with adults and approached me to chat on my first visit. From then on he came to greet me on every visit, although not straight away if he was too busy playing. I spent a lot of time with Ethan during indoor play times, often reading with him and his friend Cory. Outdoors he was usually engaged with other children riding tricycles, running around or digging in the sand pit. Ethan liked to lead play but wasn’t always successful in his efforts. He sometimes got upset when his friends disagreed with his ideas and would seek adult
help to solve his problems. During group times he often sat at the front near the leading adult (me or staff members). He regularly contributed ideas to discussions and to my songs. His best friend was Cory. They played together quite a lot, sometimes just the two of them but often with Kai, Brian and Phil. Ethan attended the centre full time so he was present for most of my visits until the end of 2009.

Cory was quite tall, of medium build, with longish wavy blond hair and a round, cheerful face. He lived with his parents and older sisters. He was extremely confident and articulate and often led the social play of the older boys. He was a skilled negotiator so could usually lead without much disagreement. In his interactions with Ethan, Cory often dominated. Cory was confident in talking with adults to the extent that he was sometimes chastised for being disrespectful. His demeanour as the end of year approached reminded me of many children about to enter school who seemed ready for new challenges and a bigger social community. He mostly played with the other older boys but mixed happily with the older girls during some parts of the day such as lunch. Cory was present both field visiting days each week until the end of 2009.

Gemma was of medium height and slim build, with shoulder length light brown hair. She lived with her parents and older sister, who had also attended Schubert Road Children’s Centre. She was confident, bright, articulate, a leader amongst the older girls and generally respected by all the children. Gemma loved to sing and dance and was quite a tuneful singer –
one of the few in the Eager Beavers group. During group sing-alongs she often sat near the front and participated in singing, actions and the contribution of ideas. I didn’t spend much time conversing or interacting with Gemma during free play times as she was usually occupied independently with her friends. She was very keen on performing and being part of any musical experiences which transpired during free play times. Gemma was present both field visit days each week until the end of 2009.

**Jessica** was the tallest child in the Eager Beavers group, of medium build, with dark brown hair, brown eyes and brown skin. She had a younger sister who attended the centre, but not on the field visit days. Jessica was socially confident and a leader in sing-alongs and performances. She interacted easily with adults but was fairly independent and was mostly busy playing with other girls. She enjoyed looking after younger girls, possibly because of her sister. She attended on only one field visit days each week until the end of 2009.

**Lola** had long light brown hair, blue eyes and smiled often. She had older siblings who had previously attended Schubert Road Child Care Centre. Lola was medium height and overweight. She smiled often and was socially confident with her female peers and with adults. She loved to sing, dance and perform. Lola and Gemma were good friends and mostly played together. Lola seemed to socialise easily and rarely had any disagreements or upsets with her peers.
**Brian** was of medium height and slight build, with blonde hair. He attended on only one field visit days each week until the end of 2009. He was a confident and independent child. He was quite often restless or boisterous during group times and was regularly reprimanded for this by staff. He often played with Ethan, Cory and Kai. Although he didn’t always seem very interested in singing, several comments he made to me indicated that he actually listened to my singing quite intently.

**Bonnie** was quite tall, of medium build, with brown hair. She had a soft, low voice. She was generally a quiet child and seemed quite shy with both adults and peers. However she was popular with the group of older girls. She was mostly a follower in their social play and seemed happy about this. I rarely conversed with Bonnie. She generally didn’t spend much time with adults at the centre, but was mostly busy playing with her friends. Bonnie attended the centre only one field visit day each week until the end of 2009.

**Alison** was tall, but not quite as tall as Bonnie or Jessica, of slight build, with long blonde hair. She was enjoyed talking with adults and quite often sought out my company. Alison was less confident in socialising with her peers and often played alone. Indoors she often did puzzles or engaged in art activities. She played more confidently with slightly younger children. She was present both field visit days until the end of 2009.

**Heidi** was fairly tall, with longish light brown hair. She had a quiet voice and placid face. Heidi attended only one field visit day each week until the
end of 2009. She seemed not to have any strong friendships with other children, and often sought out adult company. After about two months she seemed to feel quite comfortable with me and would be by my side for much of the day. She regularly asked to draw in my notebook. Heidi rarely had turns in the performances which were so frequent towards graduation time, although she enjoyed watching them.

**Jason** was fairly small, with brown hair and eyes. He was an articulate child who enjoyed talking with adults and peers. He was a little over four and a half when field visits commenced. Although he was a member of the graduating group, he was considerably younger than most of them, and rarely played with them. Jason attended on only one field visit day each week until the end of 2009. He was close friends with Martin and Marian and spent most of his time at Schubert Road playing with them. These three children often sought me out for a chat during play times.

**Rochelle** was small for her age, with long dark brown hair and brown eyes. She was a little over four and a half years old at the start of field visits. She was the youngest member of the graduating group. Rochelle played alone or with younger children most of the time. She seemed quite a confident child, in that she had no hesitation in stating her ideas or preferences when necessary, whether to adults or peers. She was very self-sufficient and kept very busy while at the centre, so she didn’t often seek out adult company or support. However if she noticed a small group of children around an adult she would usually come to see what was happening and would join in if she
was interested. Rochelle had a very quiet speaking voice and spoke fast and at times indistinctly. I found it hard to understand her speech at times and on the rare occasions when she did come and speak to me I often had to ask her to repeat herself. Rochelle attended only one field visit day each week until the end of 2009.

Younger Eager Beavers

Some of these children were over four years old at the start of my field visits and could have entered school with the graduating group, but were being held back for another year. Others were three to four years old.

Molly was nearly four and a half at the start of field visits. She was just old enough to proceed to school the next year, but her parents had decided that she would stay at Schubert Road for another year. She had two particular friends (Katey and Lana) who were in the graduating group, but they often clashed. One of the three of them crying and seeking adult intervention to help with their social problems was a regular occurrence in the Eager Beavers room. I rarely spent time with Molly in the first six months of field visits, as she was mostly occupied playing with her two special friends, and none of the three sought my company. However after the new year, when Katey and Lana were no longer at Schubert Road, Molly began to seek me out sometimes. In the first six months of visits, I noticed during group sing-alongs that Molly was a confident and tuneful singer who learnt new songs easily. However social situations with her peers were of much more immediate importance to her than singing, so her attention was not always
focused on participation during group times. This changed substantially in
the final months of field visits, when Molly seemed conscious that she was
a leader in the Eager Beavers, being now one of the oldest in the group. She
seemed keen to demonstrate to the newer Eager Beavers that she had a prior
relationship with me and my songs. Molly attended on both field visit days
each week.

Martin was over four and a half at the start of my field visits, but like
Molly, was being held back for another year before school. He was quite
tall, with light brown hair and big brown eyes. He was a thoughtful and
articulate child, but quite shy with the larger peer group. He often engaged
me in conversation and was usually the first to greet me on my arrival in the
mornings. Martin attended only one field visit days each week. He mostly
played with Marian and Jason. After Jason graduated to school, Martin and
Marian continued to greet me and chat whenever I visited.

Tara was four years old at the start of my visits. She was of medium height
and build, with long black hair, brown eyes and dark skin. She was quietly
confident, settled and happy at the centre and usually busy playing. She
sometimes played alone but was often with other girls from the younger
group. She was very competent at drawing and art. She also had a tuneful
singing voice and loved to dance. Whenever recorded music was playing
and children were dancing, Tara was part of this. I regularly noticed Tara
singing to herself as she went about her play. Tara attended on both field
visit days each week.
Phil was four years old, of medium height and slight build. He had light brown hair and tanned skin. He had quite a high pitched speaking voice. He mostly played with boys, and was especially keen to be part of group play with Ethan, Cory, Brian and Kai. However they sometimes excluded him and often over-rove his ideas, which would upset him. He cried fairly easily and would usually seek adult help to resolve his difficulties with his peers. He often sat near me during group sing-alongs. The extent of his participation very much depended on what the older boys were doing, as he tended to follow their lead. I didn’t spend time in extended conversation with Phil, but he did quite often come over to me to say hello, and became very keen to have turns of my camera. A few of the photos of children playing the djembe featured in this chapter were taken by Phil. Phil attended on both field visit days each week.

Felix was approximately 3 years old at the start of field visits, and was new to the centre, attending only one day per week. He was small for his age, with a round, smiling face and blonde hair. He became my regular companion each Tuesday. He has a form of cerebral palsy and has limited mobility. Felix connected socially with me when he first began attending and was feeling very unsettled and shy in the new environment. From about his third Tuesday onwards he would always come over to me as soon as I arrived, usually by crawling – his preferred mode of indoor mobility as it was a much quicker way to move around than walking with a frame. Felix loved to chat and loved to sing. He was very keen on the Wiggles, and we often talked about them and sang their songs together.
Marian was a little over four at the start of field visits. She was of medium height and build, with long light brown hair. She spent some time with Martin in the first few months of field visits, as well as with the other four year old girls; however she didn’t have any particular friendships with these girls. Like Martin, she only attended on one field visit days each week. In the last months of field visits, when the graduating group had left, she and Martin spent most of their time at Schubert Road together. Marian enjoyed conversing with me, and also enjoyed writing in my notebook. Over the months of my visits I noticed significant process in her written literacy skills. She was very proud of these. Marian was always interested in participating in singing and actions during group sing-alongs, but only began to offer ideas once the graduating children had left.

Megan was approximately three and a half at the start of field visits. She was fairly small, of medium build, with short brown hair. She was a quiet but independent child, seeming very settled at the centre. She would sometimes come over to me during play times, particularly if I had a musical instrument with me. She featured in many photos of performance play taken during free play times. Megan was quiet in large group sing-alongs, not volunteering ideas, but participating with interest.

Staff

There were generally three or four staff members present in the Eager Beavers room. Two of these feature in the portrait of the lives of the six songs, so these two are profiled below.
Dana was both room leader of the Eager Beavers and acting director of the Schubert Road Child Care Centre during fieldwork. She is of medium height and build, aged in her forties. She has a generally friendly, cheerful and energetic demeanour and approach to her work and to people. She was present most days during fieldwork, but not always in the room as she was often busy with administrative duties. Dana has a Diploma in Children’s Services and many years work experience as an educator. She has worked at Schubert Road Child Care Centre for about 12 years and had close relationships with most children, staff and families at the centre. Dana was interested in the research and was happy to be flexible to accommodate my needs.

Jeannie was a part time early childhood teacher in the Eager Beavers room. She worked three days per week and was present most Tuesdays during fieldwork. She was an experienced teacher and had been at the centre for several years. She was a cheerful and helpful person. Jeannie didn’t become closely involved with the research and I didn’t develop a strong relationship with her.
Prelude

Journal, 28 July, 2009

As I entered the Eager Beavers room this morning I was assailed by the sounds of drums, maracas, bells and assorted percussion instruments. A small group of children was making a big noise! Observing the enthusiastic instrumental play, Dana (room leader) asked the children if they would all like to play instruments together. “Yes! Yes!” came the excited reply. She gathered the children in a circle and gave everyone an instrument. Many of the children noticed who else had the same instrument as them, and communicated with each other about this. There were drums, tambourines, maracas, bells, castanets, tapping sticks, one pair of cymbals and a few triangles.

Dana held up a green sign. Arms waved energetically, eyes widened and faces showed intense concentration as most of the children made the loudest sounds they possibly could. There was some general feeling of a common beat, but not everyone synchronised their sounds with it. The children were very excited. Many children put their whole body into the effort of producing sound. There were smiles, giggles and eye contact between friends. Then everyone froze as Dana held up a red sign. The contrast in sound level was intense. All movement ceased and the children looked at each other in momentary suspense. That is, until Dana held up the green sign!
As the game progressed the dynamics settled from extremely loud to very loud, and the feeling of a common beat was stronger.

After the children had played the stop/go game for a little while, Dana put the signs away and asked those who had matching instruments to stand up and play for the group, so everyone had a turn in an ensemble or solo. Nearly all participated willingly - some a little hesitant and shy, others smiling confidently and shaking or tapping with great gusto. Anyone who was unwilling could choose not to join in, but only one or two of the youngest children made this choice. During ensemble ‘performances’ I noticed that most of the children performing together glanced at each other to synchronise their beat and tempo. Where one member of an ensemble was a social leader in the class, the others followed that child’s lead.

Following the ensemble and solo performances, Dana asked each child by name to bring their instrument to the baskets beside her. She used a karaoke microphone and pretended to be a TV interviewer, asking each one if they’d had fun with the instruments and what they’d liked best. Many children caught on to this dramatic play and were happy to be interviewed. Here are some typical responses.

Ethan: “I liked to play REALLY loud.”
Katey: “I liked it because I like to play really loud.”
Tara: “I like it all the time. I like to play.”
Gemma: “I liked playing loud.”

Lana: “I liked to play REALLY loud.”

Cory: “I liked doing it loud. (Dana: “how did it make you feel?”) Happy.”

Phil: “I liked to shake.” (He had played a maraca).

Brian: “I like the drum. I like to bang really loud.”

Kai: “I banged the cymbals.”

Matt: “I didn’t like it. Too noisy.”

**Emerging themes**

In this episode four dominant features of the centre’s musical culture became evident: loudness, social interaction, communication and performance to an audience. The early identification of these key features provided a structure of emergent themes to explore further over the months of fieldwork. Underpinning these themes were the children’s interest in movement as a response to sound and singing, and clear indications of the pervasive influence of commercial electronic media.

**Loudness**

This instrumental session was not the first time loud music-making was evident. On the first field visit, when the children sat down to sing with Dana at group time, their interest in loud singing was clear as they enthusiastically sang/shouted their favourite standard songs, as well as my song Little steam train, which Dana had taught them using the recording
given to staff prior to the start of fieldwork. Most of the children seemed to enjoy loud music. It was not clear whether Dana herself enjoyed loud music, or if her positive response to the children’s loud singing was based on her observation of their enjoyment. Nevertheless this instance of the children’s enthusiasm for loud singing and music-making indicated that loudness was definitely an important theme for further investigation.

Over the months of fieldwork, loud dynamics and fast tempi were evident in much of the children’s group singing and music-making. If whoever was leading the singing offered children a choice of dynamics or tempo in a song, nearly everyone chose loud and/or fast. In conversations about transport, especially with boys, speed was usually mentioned. Observations of spontaneous play with vocal accompaniment around cars or other vehicles showed children, often boys, making very loud engine sounds and regularly racing their vehicles against those of others. It seemed that many of the children found the expenditure of energy involved in singing, vocalising or playing instruments loudly, and in moving their bodies fast in response to songs or recorded music, to be greatly satisfying.

The children’s loud and often fast adaptations of songs showed their use of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005), as they collaborated to shape their musical responses by incorporating ideas and interests from their life experiences. Their music-making also showed CM, evident in their instinctive intersubjectivity as they synchronised beat, tempo and often vocal quality with each other, creating shared musical narratives.
Very often during child-led, spontaneous group singing or percussion playing a leader would emerge and other children could be seen watching and listening, and synchronising dynamics and tempo, as well as pitch, in singing or chanting with the leader. Leaders of these music-making episodes were nearly always the social leaders in other play interactions. So peer social structures influenced the children’s creation of musical cultures.

The energetic, physical styles of singing and instrument playing which were common during spontaneous play were likewise evident during adult-led structured group music-making. Data generated during group sing-along sessions revealed that the most active songs were the ones which engaged the children longest, and those for which many children vied to suggest actions and adaptations. The potential for choosing forms of physical engagement also became potential opportunities for interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005) of the song, which could explain why such songs were most popular with the children. Very often when the song Little steam train was sung someone would call out “Let’s sing a fast train!” and the vocalising of steam engine sounds would be as fast and as loud as the children could produce, accompanied by rapid high energy arm movements to mimic the pistons and wheels of a steam train.

Bjørkvold’s (1989) interpretation of young children’s singing as being a form of ngoma (an African word for music-making which is interactive and incorporates dance, drama and story) provides an explanation for the interest of the children in the Eager Beavers group in loud and energetic
physical renditions of songs. Bjørkvolde argues that young children’s singing should be viewed as a form of play, hence its multi modal totality of engagement – vocal, physical, linguistic, cognitive, emotional. He sees ngoma as being part of the way children use singing to make meaning of their world.

Loud dynamics and fast tempo commonly go together in contemporary children’s songs. Many recordings produced for children are stylistically similar to adult popular music, and are predominantly loud and fast. Like adult popular music these recordings generally have a multi-layered accompaniment featuring drums and pitched electronic instruments. Such recordings are widely popular and very familiar to most Australian children (Barrett, 2003b; Lee, Bartolic, & Vandewater, 2009), including the children of the Eager Beavers group. They are heavily marketed to children and families through TV and retail merchandising. This accessibility is one explanation of their popularity, but it raises further issues for exploration.

In particular it raises the question of whether children’s interest in loud and fast music has come about because of their extensive exposure to this style of music. Do adults write songs for, perform for, or sing with, children loud and fast so often because they assume children will like this? However are children’s preferences due to familiarity, because of the musical diet of loud, fast music provided by adults? Or is it that children’s energy and naturally fast movement make them most attracted to songs and music that are fast and loud? It is likely that many early childhood professionals make
this assumption, and hence provide loud and fast music for young children. Some exploration of these issues is contained in the narrative portrait of the life cycles of the six songs presented in the next chapter of this thesis. However these questions also present possibilities for future research into early childhood musical cultures.

Fast and loud music seems to invite a movement/dance response. Children’s innate urge to respond physically to music (Young, 2003) is evident from infancy. Observation of young children’s spontaneous singing can provide some clues about this. The spontaneous or child-led singing of the children in the Eager Beavers group observed during this research was quite often, but not always, loud and fast. However their music-making with instruments was nearly always fast and loud. This could be indicative of physical pleasure experienced through expending physical energy and strength in tapping or shaking the instruments.

Similarly the children in the Eager Beavers group seemed most interested in moving or dancing when they heard loud and fast music. A dancing episode observed one day during outdoor play time led to further reflection on this issue.

Journal, 13 October, 2009

* A CD of pop music style children’s songs was playing on the verandah and a group of about 15 children - Eager Beavers and Rainbows - were dancing alongside Dana and a Rainbow Room staff
member. The two adults moved away after a few minutes to attend to the needs of other children, but the dancers continued bouncing, jumping and twirling happily for a few more songs. However when a slower, quieter song came on, the dancing petered out, some children moved away, and others stood around looking unsure. The Rainbow Room staff member noticed this and moved over to the CD player, saying “That’s no good for dancing, is it? You need something faster and louder.”

This observation raised the question of whether a change of music was needed, or whether adult modelling of alternate ways to move with the smooth, sustained melody of a quieter, slower song were needed. Do we as adults provide children with what they want, or just what we think they want? Have we in fact created those wants, or have we responded to children’s interests? These are some issues for consideration by early childhood and music educators in relation to the musical provisions they make for children in their curricula.

Corsaro’s insights into children’s creation of peer cultures could also be relevant to their common interest in loud and fast music-making. He speaks of children’s focus on issues of autonomy and power as often being evident in their play and conversations (2005). Moving fast implies being first to reach a point, or winning, and likewise making loud sounds is powerful, as these sounds will dominate a situation and overpower other sounds.
Therefore children’s music-making preferences could be at least in part related to these broader social concerns.

**Social interaction**

Early impressions of the music-making of the children in the Eager Beavers group showed that social relationships between them were an important feature, whether they were singing, dancing or playing instruments. This was clearly evident in the group instrumental session described earlier, during which the children watched each other carefully and matched their movements with those of friends or social leaders. In general the children synchronised the energy of their movements in playing, and hence their dynamics, with those of others. Some also synchronised their pulse with that of others (CM), but not all children did this.

In the musical episode described in the Prelude, the children’s social focus was also evident in their answers to Dana’s ‘interview’ questions, as many echoed the words of children who had spoken before them. This type of response could be interpreted in several ways. It didn’t seem that all children felt they had to respond positively. Matt, for example, felt comfortable in saying that he thought the instruments were too loud. It was more likely that children who echoed others’ answers did this because they wished to agree with particular friends or with members of the group they admired.
This impression was conveyed largely through observation of body language and eye contact, interpreted in accordance with professional knowledge and experience. Over many years as an early childhood educator, working with groups of children whose social networks I came to know well, I have often observed children following the lead of those who were special to them in some way. This social focus in music-making continued to be strongly noticeable in observations and interactions with the children throughout fieldwork.

The children’s social interest in music-making was used by the Eager Beavers staff in their transitions during the routine of the day. This is a common function of music in early childhood settings. It is an example of the use of music as a form of social control (de Nora, 2000; Merriam, 1964), an aspect of music in culture discussed in Chapter Two. In the Eager Beavers room a recording of the musical theme of an old children’s TV show (Skippy the kangaroo), which has a fast tempo and electronic instrumentation, was played at ‘tidy up time’ – the transition between indoor and outdoor play time. One teacher in the room, Jeannie, also used a simple traditional action song - My hands are clapping (anon) - to gain the children’s attention during transitions. The children responded with lively interest and co-operation to each of these musical signals. Many of them hummed along with the Skippy theme as they put toys in baskets or books on shelves, and all joined in with Jeanie’s song whenever they heard her begin it.
Blacking (1967), like Merriam (1964) and de Nora (2000), points out the value of music as a social organiser or teaching tool. The effective use of music for transitions at Schubert Road supports their views. This use of music allowed the children of the Eager Beavers group to sing, which they enjoyed, and transformed routines into social musical interactions. Perhaps too the happy co-operation of the children during these occasions can be viewed in terms of Bjørkvold’s (1989) interpretation of music as having an ngoma function in children’s lives, allowing them to use music playfully as they go about their daily routines.

**Communicative musicality**

The third dominant impression gained from the instrumental session described in the Prelude was that even in this simple musical improvisation communicative musicality (CM) (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) was evident. Most children were synchronising quality (dynamics) and pulse (beat) to some extent. Reflection on data and exploration of literature led to interpretation of this synchronisation in terms of CM. CM, which is simply a musical aspect of social interaction, became central to interpretation of data as fieldwork progressed.

Every singing episode observed or shared during fieldwork which involved interaction between two or more people provided evidence of the children’s innate CM. The children may not have been consciously thinking about what they were doing, but they were instinctively synchronising their voices and/or movements with those of their singing companions. From about the
second month of fieldwork, by which time I was a familiar face to the children and had formed many friendly relationships, a few of the older children, particularly Ethan, often asked for turns to play my guitar. CM was particularly clear in these guitar exploration sessions.

Journal, 20 October, 2009

Ethan sat on a small chair on the verandah strumming my guitar while I held my fingers in chord positions for him. A small group of children gathered on the ground in front of the chair and listened with interest as Ethan sang a song of his own composition about a dump truck. The melody line was a monotone, but the lyrics had a strong repetitive rhythm pattern, with each line being of equal length. These lines didn’t necessarily contain the same number of syllables. Ethan simply extended single syllables over several notes where necessary to make a regular rhythmic structure and 4/4 metre. His pitch wavered around the root note of the chord I was fingering, which was within his speaking voice range (E major). As he sang he strummed the guitar in time with the beat of his singing, unconsciously accenting the first of each group of 4 beats, to fit with the rhythm of his song. Many of the children watching were clapping, tapping their knees or moving their bodies in time with Ethan’s strumming. These are the lyrics he sang, with metric divisions marked:
“There was a / dump truck
It had / four wheels
It had a / steering wheel
And / four doors too
It loaded/ lots of dirt
And / rocks and bricks
And it / drove them down the / road.”

Figure 4.1 Photograph: Ethan sings his song to his friends

Video clips of episodes such as this one revealed that most children synchronised their beat responses to those of whoever was leading the singing. Many of these video clips were shared with the children. On these occasions I tried to pose questions about what they were doing musically, such as “What is Ethan doing with his hands? What are the other children doing with their hands?” The replies received were comments such as “Clapping”, or “Playing the guitar”, or no comment at all. No-one seemed
to be aware of the synchronisation happening. As we watched DVDs of ourselves I used open ended comments and questions to encourage conversation rather than to run structured interviews. Informal conversations were used to allow children’s voices to be heard authentically, as in structured interviews children are more likely to answer with what they think is correct rather than saying just expressing their ideas or opinions (Clark & Moss, 2005; O’Kane, 2000).

The children’s lack of meta-awareness of their instinctive CM seemed to be in keeping with Bjørkvold’s interpretation of young children’s singing. The children of the Eager Beavers group treated these singing episodes as shared play with Ethan while he used the guitar to sing about a subject of great interest to him and many of his friends, dump trucks. The singing, strumming and beat movements in which they all engaged were their use of music in their social play - an instinctive use of music as a form of social communication and meaning-making and an unconscious but powerful ability to use CM.

**Performance to an audience**

During many of the musical sessions observed at Schubert Road Child Care Centre, including the instrumental session described in the Prelude, there was a strong sense of performers and audience. Dana had facilitated this by inviting small groups and soloists to stand and play for the others. She also encouraged the audience to clap for the performers. Her playful approach to performance was continued through the use of a microphone (which I later
discovered was present in the room and freely available to the children most of the time) and through her playful dramatisation of the role of a TV interviewer. When Dana took the microphone and assumed this role most of the children fell into their play roles as TV stars very comfortably, leading to the assumption that this sort of interaction had happened before in the Eager Beavers room.

Performance to an audience developed out of children’s spontaneous play on several occasions during fieldwork. The following is one example.

**Journal, 27 October, 2009**

On this lovely warm spring morning during outdoor play time Dana put on a CD of pop-style children’s music which was up tempo, with a heavy bass and electronic percussion accompaniment under the vocal track. A group of about ten children came over to dance with her. Before long Gemma, Lola and a few younger followers stepped onto a nearby row of balancing tubs, using them as an impromptu stage. Others noted this and soon the each of the tubs in the row was occupied. Dana produced some toy microphones and inflatable electric guitars, which children grabbed enthusiastically. An audience gathered in front of the tubs, joining in the dancing and clapping at the end of each song. “I want a turn, can I be next on the stage?” whined three year old Megan, who was dancing energetically in front of the ‘stage’.
Altogether about 15 children were gathered here, and some jostling developed over turns to be on the stage and to use a microphone or guitar. Dana observed this and brought out a box of home-made microphones (cardboard rolls covered in silver paper), so that everyone had a prop of some kind. The group assembled here included Eager Beavers and some two year olds from the Rainbow group. These younger children were happy to bob up and down to the music, watching and sharing in dancing with the older children. It was only Eager Beavers who vied for turns on the improvised stage of upturned plastic tubs.

![Figure 4.2 Photograph: Impromptu performance](image)

The children’s interest in music-making as a performance art, similar to what they had probably seen on TV and in DVDs, was often part of their
spontaneous play. Although on this occasion the dancing was initiated by an adult, it was Gemma and Lola who transformed the play into a performance, by setting up a stage and finding suitable performance props. This episode was an interesting example of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005), where the children adapted the play to create their own social scenario. This is also an example of the children using music in social and playful ways, as ngoma (Bjørkvold, 1989).

Over the months of fieldwork at Schubert Road, Dana often adopted a playful, flamboyant, performance-style role when leading structured group times with the children of the Eager Beavers group, whether music-making or story sessions. The children responded to this with great enjoyment and excitement. On several occasions she structured music and drama experiences so that small groups of children took turns to perform for the others. Many of the children, especially most of the oldest ones who were about to graduate to school, really enjoyed this, and vied for turns. These children also created their own impromptu performances such as the one above during free play times. As fieldwork progressed the children’s interest in this type of play became a useful data generation strategy.

The performer and audience play was partly inspired by a visit the children of the Eager Beavers group made to the primary school next door to watch a performance of the traditional story The gingerbread man by a Kindergarten class. After this visit Dana asked the children if they would like to perform a play as the school children had. Most of the group
expressed enthusiasm. In particular Ethan, Cory, Lola, Gemma, Jessica and Brian were very keen. Dana suggested to the children that they perform The Three little pigs, and the children happily agreed. The preparations for this performance and the writing of a song to accompany it are explored in Chapter Five.

The pervasiveness of the performer/audience dynamic in the centre’s musical culture influenced my role in leading group sing-along sessions. In keeping with the least adult role (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Mandell, 1991), I was generally more collaborator than entertainer. I endeavoured to involve the children in physical participation and in sharing ideas so that their interests guided our singing. I have a fairly quiet speaking voice and a gentle way of interacting with a group. In the Eager Beavers room this created challenges at times, as it was difficult to engage the attention of the entire group.

As fieldwork progressed it seemed that the children adopted audience roles during group times, and saw staff as performers. The seating arrangements often used in the Eager Beavers room may have played a part in establishing these roles and relationships. At most group times the adult leading the group would sit in front of the children on a chair, with the children facing her. This seating arrangement creates a situation of difference and division between adult and children. The adult is higher than the children to allow for ease of viewing. Because he children face the adult many have their backs to each other, limiting peer interaction. An
alternative to this would be a circle or horseshoe formation, making the adult part of the group, on the same level if the adult joins the children in sitting on the floor. This arrangement means that everyone can see each other, leading to a more collaborative feeling in the group. This was sometimes done in the Eager Beavers room, but space limitations meant it was not always possible. As a temporary community member I adopted the same seating strategy as staff, so that to some extent I was a performer and the children were the audience.

![Group time seating in a performer/audience format](image)

**Figure 4.3** Photograph: Group time seating in a performer/audience format

Observation of video data showed that the children at the front of the group were mostly more engaged with the songs than those sitting at the back or off to the side. I endeavoured to engage all the children through encouraging comments, eye contact and invitations to contribute ideas. This
worked sometimes, but not always. Further exploration of my role and relationships with children during fieldwork is contained in Chapter Six. The issue of seating arrangements is discussed here because it relates to the performer audience approach to music-making which was part of the centre’s musical culture.

Another common feature of the performer/audience situation is that the child audience is often encouraged to interact with the performer[s] by shouting out excitedly. Weddell (2005) points out that this is a convention of audiences, and especially child audiences, which can be traced back through history. In the context of education, however, it can limit children’s more meaningful engagement with the content of a performance. This sort of relationship is also very much at odds with the view of children and educators as collaborators in a learning community which is advocated by current early childhood curricula in Australia and elsewhere (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Office of Child Care NSW, 2006; NZ Ministry of Education, 1996). The children of the Eager Beavers group often shouted out responses during structured group sessions. This was encouraged at times, although Dana and other staff also ensured that they asked particular individuals to respond, so that interactions were not always with the more confident, dominant children in the group.

When the children of the Eager Beavers group adapted performer/audience roles and relationships in their own ways, the divide between performer and audience often became blurred. This happened during structured adult-led
music-making as well as in spontaneous play, when audience members would step in to join or support performers. Performers mostly embraced this collaboration happily. Children also looked for opportunities to play the role of ‘teacher’ and lead their friends in singing. This was observed regularly and the respect with which children watched and followed the lead of these pretend teachers was clear. Their smiles and rapt attention seemed to show that they understood how satisfying the experience of having this powerful role was to the incumbent.

During the fourth month of fieldwork the children’s enthusiasm for performer/audience play became a significant data generation strategy. The help of Dana and the children was enlisted to organise video recording sessions of solo singing. Many were keen to be part of these performances, so a ‘stage’ was set up using a large, low table, and Dana manipulated a sheet to mimic a curtain. The karaoke microphone was used firstly by a child announcer then by a child singer. Most of the children who chose to participate as singers or announcers were in the oldest, graduating group. Dana asked them which song they would like to sing, but tried to encourage them to choose one of my songs. Most children chose traditional favourites such as Twinkle twinkle little star. Only one of the children, Bonnie, chose Little steam train.

Many of the recordings of these solo performances show audience members participating energetically in the singing and dancing by the side of the stage along with the performer. Several recording sessions were held over a
few weeks towards the end of 2009, in the days leading up to the graduation celebrations. Some older girls, such as Gemma, Lola and Jessica quickly became leaders of the sessions, selecting performers, taking turns to announce them, handing around the microphone, attempting to influence song choices, as well as leading much of the singing. Their enthusiasm for playful performance was obvious. As social leaders of the children in the Eager Beavers group, especially of the girls, their interest influenced most of the other children, who watched, sang along with, and applauded, the performances happily.

Many of the key themes already identified were evident during these singing performances. The sessions provided examples of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005) of performer/audience roles and relationships, led by the older children. The children’s responses during the sessions, and their comments on viewing the recordings, supported Bjørkvold’s (1989) view of singing as ngoma, with the functions of play. The singing and the songs were something the children used as they engaged in performance play with their peers. CM was also evident in the eye contact and attention between performers and audience members, as they synchronised pitch, dynamics, beat and tempo in their shared singing.

The prevalence of standard, largely traditional children’s songs in the choices made was significant. In spite of the children’s extensive exposure to commercial children’s song recordings, only one child out of the 12 who performed during these sessions chose a song from a mass market
children’s group, The Wiggles. Bjørkvold (1989) found in his research, conducted in Norway, USSR and USA, that young children’s singing choices mostly came from the standard traditional repertoire. Given that his research was done approximately 20 years ago, it was very interesting to find that these children’s choices in 2009 mirrored those Bjørkvold had documented. He suggests that song repertoire shared with children from infancy through interaction with close adults in the context of meaningful relationships has the strongest influence on young children’s singing. This further highlights the broad relevance of the research into infant CM, as it points to these early singing interactions being the foundation of children’s musical development and cultures.

Influence of children’s music products and community musical cultures

During many informal conversations held with the children about music, all either mentioned DVDs of mass market children’s groups (mainly The Wiggles or The Fairies) or current pop chart hits which they’d seen on TV or heard on radio or CD with their families. It seemed in my research, as in Bjørkvold’s (1989), that the songs children spoke about as favourites and those they chose to sing were not the same. A conversation with Alison stands out.

Journal, 11 August, 2009

Alison was doing a puzzle and I sat down next to her at the puzzle table. She looked up and saw me and said “Hi”, so I greeted her in
return. She continued to work on the puzzle, but about a minute later looked at me and said, “Do you like pink?” I replied that it wasn’t my favourite colour, I actually liked blue and green better. “Which colour do you like best?” I asked her. She looked at me as if I was a bit silly and began to talk about a song which she liked which went “baby, baby”. “Oh, that Pink, the one who sings,” I said. Alison nodded, and continued humming “baby, baby” to herself. “That’s my favourite song,” she said. I asked her to sing it for me. She began but petered out after a few notes and went back to her puzzle.

It is significant in relation to Bjørkvold’s (1989) findings that Alison’s stated favourite song was a pop song which she wasn’t able to sing, but obviously enjoyed listening to. During group singing sessions, when individual children were asked to choose a song for us to sing, Alison often put her hand up. She generally chose Twinkle twinkle little star or the ABC song, which uses the same tune. So it seemed that for Alison there were favourites to listen to and favourites to sing, which were distinctly different songs. The research of Bjørkvold (1989) and Trevarthen and Malloch (2009) provide feasible explanations for this dichotomy. However there may also be other developmental reasons for this difference, as pop songs are musically and linguistically difficult for young children, and their meanings are not necessarily comprehensible or relevant to them.
The musical styles of adult pop music were very familiar to Alison and the other children of the Eager Beavers group. This was particularly evident in their dancing responses to recorded music and their use of instruments and inflatable guitars, with which they mimicked the movements of musicians as seen on contemporary popular music videos. Perhaps this is why mass market children’s music is so popular, as it employs similar musical styles to adult popular music: melodies, harmonies, structure, rhythms and electronic instrumental arrangements. This music, while being stylistically similar to adult popular music, has lyrics that are more relevant and meaningful to young children, as well as colourful and lively video production to accompany it. Given too that it is adults who play this content on TV and who purchase CDs and DVDs for children, the pop-style familiarity of the musical content is appealing for many adults (DeNora, 2000; Arthur, 2005).

The commodification of children’s music means that it is present in some form or other in most children’s lives in Australia (Barrett, 2003b; Pitman, 2008). Several popular musical groups feature on children’s TV shows, their DVDs are available everywhere, as are many types of branded merchandise. It is a rare Australian child who has not heard of the singing group The Wiggles, and who cannot sing at least snatches of several of their songs. During fieldwork at Schubert Road Child Care Centre knowledge of these musical commodities was useful as a way to build relationships with the children. For example, my relationship with Felix, and his developing
friendships with other children, had their roots in his interest in The Wiggles.

Felix began attending the centre in August 2009. He attended only on Tuesdays, and at first was very shy and unhappy. Felix was three and a half at that time. He has a disability, a mild form of cerebral palsy, so that he cannot stand unsupported or walk without using a walking frame. He is able to crawl and often uses this way of moving around, rather than waiting for adult assistance.

Journal, 18 August, 2009

Felix was sitting alone on a mat near some construction toys on the verandah when I arrived today. I sat down on the mat next to him and said hello. He was crying quietly, so I decided to abandon the ‘least adult role’ I generally adopted and try to initiate some interaction to see if I could cheer him up. Felix was wearing a Wiggles T-shirt, which featured a picture of Jeff (the keyboard player of the group) and was purple (Jeff’s signature colour). “I like your shirt,” I said to him, “that’s Jeff isn’t it?”

Felix seemed pleased that I knew Jeff. He smiled through his tears and nodded. I asked him which Wiggle was his favourite. That simple question opened the conversation floodgates. Felix began to chat about Jeff, about how he always falls asleep and wears a purple shirt. We chatted about the special way The Wiggles always
wake Jeff up (by shouting “Wake up Jeff!”) and Felix told me which songs he liked best from The Wiggles, and which DVDs he had at his house. He even knew which song was on each particular DVD, and which song tracks were scratched and wouldn’t work properly. He became very animated and much more cheerful. I decided to fetch my guitar so that we could sing some of his favourite songs. I sat down and began to strum and sing a Wiggles song, “Rockabye your bear”. Felix’s eyes lit up and he grinned broadly. He sang along too. A few other children came to join us, having noticed the guitar and heard the music, so we had a Wiggles sing-along. I asked Felix to choose the songs and he sang very strongly. He had a reasonably accurate sense of pitch and a flawless memory of lyrics and rhythm.

After that day Felix and I became firm friends. Whenever I arrived his face would light up as soon as he saw me and he would crawl over to join me, abandoning whatever he was doing. We often chatted about The Wiggles, and several times he happily sang for me into my voice recorder, or for the camera. Felix’s mobility challenges and his shyness made it difficult for him to join in some of the children’s play, particularly in the outdoors. However other children often joined the two of us and gradually Felix formed friendships with some of them through singing, sharing books or playing with construction toys or sand.
During the many instances of playful musical performance which happened during my visits, Felix was a member of the audience rather than a performer, because of his shyness as well as his disability. However when Dana and I videoed solo singing in the sessions described earlier, she asked Felix if he would like to have a turn. He was very keen, so Dana supported him while he held the microphone and sang The Wiggles’ song Rockabye your bear. He was quite confident and his grin when he finished, and the children applauded, could not have been any wider. Trevarthen (1995) speaks of a child’s innate desire to learn, and be part of, a culture. This of course includes a musical culture. For Felix, who has many challenges to deal with in participating in peer social cultures, knowledge of the songs of that culture was particularly significant in helping him to establish his identity in the Eager Beavers group.

A gender divide in the music-making of the children of the Eager Beavers group was often evident. This was possibly influenced by popular media and commodified children’s music.

**Journal, 13 August, 2009**

It was raining this morning so the children stayed indoors. I noticed some children move to the area near the CD player and karaoke machine. Four year olds Lana and Katey asked Dana for The Fairies CD and dancing ribbons, which were supplied. (The Fairies is an Australian TV show and DVD series). Tara, Alison and Sarah went to join them when they heard the music. The girls
bobbed up and down with the beat, singing snatches of the first song and waving their ribbons in time with their movements. Beth and Alison fetched long white dresses from the nearby dress up rack and put them on, asking for my help with this. Tara kept the mike for quite a while and sang some snatches of the song. She danced with swaying movements in time with the beat.

Ethan and Cory heard the music and asked Dana for some drums. She fetched them and the boys sat down near the dancing girls and started to drum very loudly. The girls shouted “too loud” over and over. The boys kept drumming and shouting “I can’t hear you” until Dana decided to ask the boys to move to the other side of the room, which worked a little better.

Socially, this situation was an example of what Corsaro (2005) interprets as the children jointly protecting their shared spaces and shared play scenarios. The girls weren’t necessarily actively excluding the boys, they just wanted to continue their singing and dancing game, and the boys were intruding. The boys in turn didn’t necessarily want to stop the girls’ game; they just wanted to make music in a different way. The boys’ music-making was also an example of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005). They noticed what the girls were doing and wanted to make music as well. However they wanted their own separate musical game, which involved high energy and loudness, the same traits as those which dominated all their play.
This gender specific social musical play can be seen as a further example of music having the function of ngoma (Bjørkvold, 1989). It also provides evidence of the influence of musical commodities and popular musical cultures in forming gender specific styles of play – fairy role-playing for the girls and rock style drumming for the boys.

Coda

The musical culture of the Eager Beavers room at Schubert Road Child Care Centre represents a musical microculture (Slobin, 1993). Slobin defines microculture as being “small units within big musical cultures” (p.11). He sees culture, including musical culture, as having multiple strata; therefore members of a cultural group, such as the children of the Eager Beavers group, are simultaneously members of cultures at many levels, so that the music culture of the group is actually an “interculture” (p. 11). The children are influenced by urban Australian culture, family culture, childhood cultures, a few by diverse ethnic cultures, and by the community culture of the Schubert Road Child Care Centre. According to Slobin, music is “at the heart of individual, group, and national identity” (p.11).

This portrait of the musical culture of the Eager Beavers group portrays influences from wider musical cultures: mass media popular music and musical commodities, both adults’ and children’s, traditional English speaking musical cultures and early childhood institutional musical
cultures. It is also clear that the musical culture of the Eager Beavers is inextricably linked to the children’s social cultures.

Slobin (1993) asks the question: Is music a reflection of culture or a constructor of culture? His answer is that music is both. This view corresponds with that of other ethnomusicologists (Nettl, 1983) as well as that of Corsaro (2005) in relation to children’s peer social cultures. Do children shape these cultures or do wider cultures shape them? This portrait indicates the veracity of Corsaro’s position – that children are active agents in the creation of their cultures through processes of interpretive reproduction. However as cultures are dynamic, the interplay between children and cultures is evident, and aspects of existing culture influence the children so that the process of creation and maintenance of culture is ongoing. Data generated in this research contained many examples of the influence of popular media-led musical cultures, both children’s and adults’, on the singing, dancing and other music-making of the children. However it also contained evidence of the children using the diverse musical cultures in their social interactions and play to shape a unique musical culture within the Eager Beavers room.

**Summary**

This chapter presented a portrait of the musical culture of the children in the Eager Beavers room at Schubert Road Child Care Centre. Four dominant themes emerged from field data. Firstly, the children showed a general
preference for loud music and music-making. Secondly, their singing and other musical responses was overwhelmingly social and interactive. Thirdly, communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) was frequently evident as the children synchronised the pulse and quality of their singing, dancing or instrumental play. Fourthly the children showed a strong interest in performing to an audience in both spontaneous play and planned musical experiences. These aspects of the musical culture shaped the children’s responses to the six songs which are the focus of this thesis and which are explored in the next chapter.

The purpose of this chapter was to portray the musical cultural landscape into which the six songs were introduced. In the next chapter the life cycles of those songs are presented as a narrative portrait. That portrait provides further illumination and exploration of the themes identified in this chapter.
Chapter Five:

The lives of songs
Overview – introducing the portrait

This chapter contains a narrative portrait of data, presented as a metaphor of a human life cycle. The metaphor is created through analysis and interpretation of data structured according to the following developmental stages: conception, gestation, birth, infancy, childhood and maturity, as defined in Chapter Three. During fieldwork ten original songs were introduced to the children in the Eager Beavers group at Schubert Road Child Care Centre. In this chapter data generated around six of these songs is explored. These data were selected because each of the six songs were sung over at least three months and data showed the development of relationships between children and these songs as well as progress through several post-birth stages of their life cycles.

The portrait in this chapter represents a synthesis of the processes of data generation and interpretation into an aesthetic whole (Hoffman Davis, 1997). Data were drawn from a range of sources – field and composition journals, written observation notes, artefacts created by children and recordings, both audio and video. The data encompassed my written reflections as a song writer, singer, educator and researcher, as well as field data generated from observations, interactions and conversations with the children during play times, meal times and structured group times. The life cycle metaphor was used to shape the data for each song into a narrative, or a written portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997), thus continuing the data generation process after the completion of field visits, through the interpretive act of creative writing (Richardson, 2003). The
individual song portraits were then analysed, reworked and integrated into a single overarching portrait of the lives of the six songs. This final portrait is thus a comparative analysis of the life cycle stages for each individual song.

The portrait conveys the various perspectives of my multiple roles in the research, as well as the perspectives of the children and, to a lesser extent, of the staff. Capturing the children’s perspectives was the greatest challenge of this research, and was less comprehensive than intended. This portrait outlines these challenges, which are then analysed further in Chapter Six.

The chapter begins with the music and lyrical texts of the six songs. The next section contains the narrative portrait of the lives of the six songs that explores the creation of music and lyrics, as well as social, cultural and developmental aspects of the children’s responses, and contextual factors. These are analysed with reference to the literature presented in Chapter Two. The chapter concludes with a discussion of emergent themes and key findings.
The six songs

**Little Steam Train**

Amanda Niland

1. **Lively** – 120

Little steam train, you’re going out today,
Little steam train, we’ll help you get on your way;
Little steam train, you’re going out today,
Little steam train, we’ll help you get on your way.

First we call the passengers: [spoken] “All aboard!”
Then we dig the coal: [spoken] “Dig, dig, dig.”
Then we toot the whistle: “Who-o-o-oo”; 
Then the wheels go around and we’re on our way.
Look around at the colours, look, look around;
Look around at the colours, look, look around;
There are so many colours that can be found;
Look around at the colours, look, look around;
Can you find any red?
There are millions of stars, in space, 'cause space is a really big place;
There are millions of stars, in space, 'cause space is a really big place.
So put on a space suit; jump in a rocket;
Do up your seatbelt; start the countdown;
[spoken] 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0…blast off!
Then we’re zooming along, in space, 'cause space is a really big place.
If a dinosaur came to your house, what would you do?
If a dinosaur came to your house, what would you do?

You could run; you could hide; under the bed; [children can devise alternate lyrics here]

Be very quiet….be very still…and listen….. [spoken] oh-oh!

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

**Final verse:** [Repeat up to hiding place]

[spoken] Or you could say “A dinosaur couldn’t come to our house, because there are no dinosaurs any more, they’re extinct!”
Hooray! Hooray! We’re glad to say
That the big bad wolf has gone away.

Hooray! Hooray! We’re glad to say
That the big bad wolf has gone away.

He huffed and he puffed but we wouldn’t let him in;
Not by the hairs of our chinny-chin-chins.
Hooray! Hooray! We’re glad to say
That the big bad wolf has gone away.
I'm a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3;
I'm a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3;
I'm a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3;
I'm a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3.

I play my drums very loudly, [alternatives: softly, fast, slowly]
I play my drums very loudly,
I play my drums very loudly,
And then I stop!
Portrait of the life cycles of six songs

Life begins: Conceptions

The initial intention to write a song for me is always linked to interactions with, or observations of, children. For some songs the interest of a child or group of children in a particular topic is the source of inspiration. For others, observation of children’s strong positive responses to a particular song becomes the inspiration to create a song with similar potential to engage children.

Songs inspired by children’s interests prior to field research

Four of the six songs presented in this portrait arose from observations of a topic of special interest to a group of children. Two of these were composed before the research and two during the research, the latter inspired by interests of children in the Eager Beavers group.

The inspiration for Little steam train arose from experience of many young children’s passion for trains. Observation of their fascination with both toy trains and the real thing led to the decision to write a song which would allow children to sing about trains as well.

Colours are of great interest to young children, especially toddlers when they first begin to identify the colours in their surroundings. Observations of this inspired the writing of Look around at the colours. “Look! Red!” said Amy, aged 23 months, proudly pointing out the colour of her rain coat and her friend’s T shirt during my regular visits to a child care nursery.
Look around at the colours was written for Amy and her friends, to enhance their exploration of the colours around them.

**Songs inspired by children’s interests during field research**

The two songs which were written in response to interests of the children in the Eager Beavers group were *Space is a really big place* and *The little pigs’ chorus*. Because they were written during fieldwork, their creation was influenced by interactions with the children and interpretations of the culture and environment of Schubert Road Child Care Centre. Their lyrics also incorporated some children’s ideas and statements.

Although not a primary aim of this research, one secondary aim was to work with the children during fieldwork to write songs about topics of their choosing or interest. In early August, after a few weeks of field visits, I began to consider what interests seemed current in the Eager Beavers group that might provide inspiration for a song. At this time there were no particular driving interests in the children’s play themes. However conversations and observations revealed that several of the older children were interested in counting. “You know, I can count to nineteen,” Ethan told me. Martin heard him and came to join the conversation: “I can count to 10.” His friend Marian, who was hovering nearby said “I can count to 4… no … 5”. They all chanted numbers to show off their counting skill.

Consideration of how to weave counting into a song in a musically engaging way which would provide the children with scope for imagination
and active involvement led to a search of the early childhood repertoire for favourite songs involving numbers or counting. The song Dr Knickerbocker number 9 (anon) came to mind. It has rhythmic interest created by syncopation, alliterative lyrics and word play, which makes it humorous and fits with its nonsense theme. It has a fairly narrow pitch range (a 6th), counting, unusually, to 9 rather than 10, as well as actions and scope for children to incorporate their own ideas. The challenge was to write a song which would be similarly engaging for children.

Young children are commonly interested in numbers. Numbers are visibly displayed in many places which children encounter – on letterboxes, clocks, calendars, price tags, retail signs, traffic signs, money and in many other contexts. Numbers are part of the world and of great concern to the adults in most children’s lives. Children hear adults around them conversing about things such as times, dates or costs, all of which focus on numbers.

Numbers are also linked to issues of size and power. Exploration of Corsaro’s (2005) research and analysis of children’s peer cultures provides strong rationales for young children’s interest in numbers. Corsaro reveals how often children’s interactions centre on autonomy, power and control. Numbers are part of this: children compare their ages or birthdays with those of their peers, they count or measure toys and compare amounts. “I’m older”, “Mine’s bigger”, “I’ve got the most” or “I’m first” are commonly heard in children’s conversations during the day in early childhood settings. Numbers in various forms are of great interest to children. Therefore a song
about numbers and counting would seem likely to engage the children in the Eager Beavers group.

By the next visit I had not found an ‘angle’ on numbers which was appropriate to develop into a song. However that morning, when browsing photos and documentation displayed for families from the previous day, I noticed a photo of Ethan, Cory, Jessica and several of the oldest children playing in a large low box and pretending it was a space rocket. Apparently this had been a fascinating play scenario for these children and Dana and Jeannie were keen to follow up their interest in space. That day at group time Jeannie read the children an illustrated non-fiction book about planets. Observation of the keen interest of many of the older children led me to create a song about space.

The second song created specifically for the Eager Beavers children, The little pigs’ chorus, was written as the finale for a drama production that was part of the centre’s graduation celebrations for the children who were starting school the next year. The creation of the play - by Dana, in consultation with some of the children - took place during October, in preparation for the graduation event in early December. Dana’s intention to devise a drama with the children arose from a visit to a performance of the traditional tale The gingerbread man given by a kindergarten class (5 to 6 year olds) at the neighbouring public school. I had accompanied the Eager Beavers group on this visit in August, and have referred to it in Chapter Four. The older children were especially captivated by the play, possibly
partly because several of the actors were children they knew from the previous year’s Eager Beavers group. Dana was keen to follow up their interest.

After discussion with the children about the stories they knew she decided to create a dramatic version of The three little pigs. Dana wrote a simple narrative script, with spaces for the children to insert familiar dialogue from the traditional tale and found costumes for the pigs, the wolf and a farmer (he/she escorts the wolf away at the end of the story).

The children took turns to perform the play, so that everyone who wanted a role had an opportunity to perform. Dana planned to video a number of performances by different groups of children and make a DVD for families. This meant that those not selected to perform at the centre’s graduation night would still be included. I suggested writing a song to sing at the end of the play, so that everyone could join in for the finale. Hence the creation of The little pigs’ chorus.

**Songs inspired by other songs**

The conceptions of two of the songs presented in this chapter were inspired by other people’s songs and children’s responses to them. These songs were

*If a dinosaur came to your house* and *I’m a drummer in a band*.

Once a topic for a song is chosen, existing songs often play a part in the gestation stage of a new song. Exploration of musical features and potential
for children’s engagement in songs on the same topic helps stimulate my
creative thinking. However sometimes the initial conception of a song is
inspired by my experience of children’s enthusiastic engagement with an
existing song.

The inspiration to create If a dinosaur came to your house arose from a
song about a monster learnt from an early childhood colleague. It was a
humorous song, in which each verse told of a different room in a house
where a monster was located. The children could choose what the monster
would eat in each room: for example the monster in the kitchen might eat
the pots and pans. This song elicited enthusiastic participation and much
laughter whenever it was sung with children. I chose to create a song with a
similar scenario, but about dinosaurs instead of monsters. In order to give
the children some agency in the imagined situations, the narrative action in
the dinosaur song would centre on the children’s actions towards the
dinosaur rather than on what the dinosaur might do.

The second song which was inspired by children’s responses to an existing
song was I’m a drummer in a band. Young children love to create sound
using movement and energy (Young, 2003), so drumming is always
engaging for them. There are many drumming songs in the early childhood
music education repertoire, often adaptations of traditional songs. One song
heard at a professional development workshop stands out from these. That
song was written in a rock music style, with lyrics about playing in a band
and a structure that alternates between singing and drumming. The
presenter’s accounts of children’s energetic participation and enjoyment of this song inspired the decision to create an original drumming song which had scope for playful musical exploration beyond simply tapping the beat.

The conception of *I’m a drummer in a band* was unique in the six songs presented here as the initial choice of topic also included an intention to focus on children’s musical participation. For the other five songs, decisions on children’s potential musical engagement were made after the initial intention to create a song around a particular topic, during the gestation stages of their life cycles.

**Writing the songs: Gestations**

**First decisions**

Once the idea for a song about a particular topic is conceived, the next step is to decide on a central concept or action on which the song will focus. This usually relates to possibilities for children’s engagement and the decision is akin to a journalist choosing an ‘angle’ from which to approach his/her written piece. The term engagement is used here in the same way as in my previous research (Niland, 2005), where engagement was defined as having three key aspects: interest, participation and preference. Data from that research showed that these may not always be evident together in a child’s responses. However, my findings and those of others (Laevers, 1996) revealed that deep engagement, in which all three aspects are evident, is most likely to lead to learning and development. Hence the richest songs
for children can be defined as those with potential for all three aspects of engagement.

The focus chosen for a new song may involve many different forms of participation, sometimes singly but mostly in combination. These could include physical movements or gestures, sensory exploration, role play, vocal sound effects, contribution of lyrics or musical responses such as solo singing or instrumental playing. Table 5.1 below shows the forms of participation in each of the six songs.

The target age group is an important consideration in my song writing. This does not necessarily imply a view of musical development which is individualistic and based on chronological stages. Nevertheless children’s engagement with a song will be dependent on their physical and language capabilities as well as their interests. For example a song written for toddlers will not be primarily aimed at full participation in singing. It will more likely be aimed at sensory exploration and simple interactions. A song written for four and five year olds may be aimed at more conscious musical participation, such as imitating or creating rhythm patterns, or in tune singing, as well as providing greater potential for creative agency in shaping the song.

Look around at the colours, which was created for one and two year olds, needed to be very musically and linguistically simple, with a focus on inviting children to identify colours. The song would aim to encourage
interaction and play, in keeping with my findings on children’s engagement with songs (Niland, 2005). In that research I found that songs relating to children’s play interests and those with potential for individual responses, were most engaging for children. Therefore a song about colours should incorporate a playful participatory way of identifying colours for young children.

Creating narratives

A focus on narrative is central to four of the six songs. The decision to write songs that incorporate narrative was influenced by the innate interest of young children in pretend play (Frasek, Mack, Mack, Pfalz-Blezinger & Knopf, 2010). Little steam train focuses on setting out on a train journey. If a dinosaur came to your house sets up the beginning of a story and invites the children to partially dramatise it and to make decisions about the course of the narrative. Space is a really big place contains one section in which the children pretend to be astronauts. The lyrics of The little pigs’ chorus reprise part of the narrative of the traditional tale.

A focus on physical movement and sound effects guided the writing of Little steam train, as this seemed appropriate for a song about a form of transport. These forms of engagement were encouraged by lyrics suggesting dramatic role play, so that the song could be to some extent a narrative. Children would have the opportunity to participate by pretending to be a steam train, or someone who operates a steam train, setting out on a journey.
When singing train songs with children, an adult can embed them in a spoken narrative about train travel and encourage the children to participate in creating that narrative. They may choose the colour of the train, its fuel source (steam, diesel or electric), its destination and its passengers or load. Singing the song then becomes the story of a train journey. Many children, armed with knowledge gleaned from life experiences in the real world as well as from TV, join in with great interest and provide a wealth of relevant information. The DVD and book series Thomas the tank engine is often the source of much railway knowledge. Two and three year old boys in particular often express preferences based on the train characters in this series.

Participation in playful, imaginative social experiences based around a song can often lead to friendships developing out of shared cultural interests such as Thomas and his engine friends. Through these situations children may identify with each other, as a passion for trains signifies membership of a sub culture (Slobin, 1993) which contributes to the development of those children’s musical cultures.

Two of the six songs do not have a narrative focus. These are Look around at the colours and *I'm a drummer in a band*. However the latter song, like those with a narrative focus, does involve role play.
Role playing through music

Although *I’m a drummer in a band* is the only song of the set of six which involves playing an overtly musical role, that of a drummer, music is also used by children to play an imaginary role in Little steam train, Space is a really big place and If a dinosaur came to your house. Whereas for these three songs the children’s focus is on the imaginary narrative they are dramatizing, which they are building partly through their musical responses, for the drumming song the lyrics make the children consciously act as musicians, so that the integration of drumming phrases into the musical structure shapes the children’s imaginative responses.

The decision to create lyrics around dramatic role play in *I’m a drummer in a band* was aimed at adding an extra dimension of interest through play potential. The lyrics could have been much more literal, as songs for young children often are, with lines such as: “Let’s play the drums”. The use of the first person, which encourages identification with the song and the opportunity to link imagination with life experiences such as the viewing of musical performances on stage or screen, were intended to create a song which would engage children in multiple ways. Although the lyrics of this song do not create a narrative in the same way as the other three songs which involve dramatic role play, they still provide a possibility for children to imagine a scenario around being a drummer in a band, so that the song could become embedded in a wider narrative play frame (Bateson, 2006).
In Little steam train the children use their voices to create steam sounds and their arms to mimic the movement of train wheels. Musically this means the children are using the beat of the song and variations in tempo to enhance the narrative of the train’s journey. Vocal sound effects and arm movements are also used to separate the sections of the song, so that they contribute to structuring its musical form.

The children’s actions in responding to beat and tempo similarly serve to build the narrative in If a dinosaur came to your house. For example repetitions of the phrase “Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!” (see figure 5.1 below) form a bridge between verses of the song, thus contributing to both the musical form of the song and the creation of a narrative, signifying the approach of another dinosaur. The melodic structure of this phrase, a falling melodic minor scale passage, was written to create a feeling of suspense to enhance the drama of the song. This can be sung as a crescendo to suggest the dinosaur coming closer, so that dynamics are also used to build the narrative.

![Figure 5.1 Bridge phrase in If a dinosaur came to your house](image)

This is similar to the function of the steam train sound effects sections of Little steam train, which contribute to building the narrative of a train
journey. In the dinosaur song, however responses in several parts of the song, which can be sung with varying tempi and dynamics, also help to build dramatic tension into the narrative (figures 5.2 and 5.3).

![Figure 5.2 Creation of narrative in If a dinosaur came to your house](image1)

![Figure 5.3 Use of dynamic variations to create drama in If a dinosaur came to your house](image2)

In Space is a really big place there is less scope for musical responses than in the other narrative songs. However the children’s dramatic responses in the bridge section, which build a narrative about journeying to space, also contribute to structuring the musical form of the song, by creating bars of silence (for performing the actions) between each musical phrase.
Creating potential for active participation

Although the initial decisions about focus areas were not specifically musical for any songs other than *I’m a drummer in a band*, nevertheless all six songs provide some potential for musical responses as outlined above. Table 5.1 shows that the forms of participation chosen for each song allow potential for active exploration of musical elements. This potential is a quality generally sought by music educators when they select songs for young children (Bridges, 1994; Campbell & Scott Kassner, 2010). Just as it has always underpinned my own curriculum decisions as an educator, so it underpins my creative decisions as a song writer. Professional training and experience as an early childhood and music educator are key elements of my practice and identity as a creator of songs for children.

The published repertoire of songs and recordings for young children produced in the last fifty years is vast. Those songs which are in collections designed for music education are generally most likely to provide potential for active participation and musical exploration by children (Forrai, 1988; Hoermann & Bridges, 1994). However many songs written for children are
primarily intended for entertainment and hence do not often provide such potential. This means that songs created for children may not incorporate opportunities for children to use the full potential of their innate communicative musicality (CM) (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). Songs that lack opportunities for participation and interaction to create shared narratives are also limited in scope for allowing children to be active agents in creating their musical identities and cultures through processes such as interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005).

Given that children’s musical skills are still developing in the early years, songs which are most suited to educational curricula are often very simple and may be aesthetically less satisfying than those in general collections designed for entertainment. A desire to create songs which are aesthetically pleasing as well as physically and vocally engaging for young children is one of the reasons I began to write songs and to research children’s songs and singing. Children need quality musical repertoire (Bridges, 1994) which will engender their natural attraction to music while at the same time enabling them to develop their musical skills. As a song writer and educator I wish to create songs for children which have both attributes. Table 5.1 below summarises the forms of participation in the six songs and table 5.2 shows how these enable children to explore elements of music, so that the songs assist children’s musical growth.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Train</th>
<th>Colours</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Dinosaur</th>
<th>Little pigs</th>
<th>Drummer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role play</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
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<td>Physical movement</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyric adaptations</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument playing</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual turns</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Potential forms of participation in the six songs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Train</th>
<th>Colours</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Dinosaur</th>
<th>Little pigs</th>
<th>Drummer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musical elements explored</td>
<td>Beat Tempo</td>
<td>Beat Form</td>
<td>Form</td>
<td>Beat Tempo Form</td>
<td>Fermata (pause)</td>
<td>Beat Tempo Dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of exploration</td>
<td>Moving arms with beat</td>
<td>Tapping beat; Finding stated colour</td>
<td>Role play astronaut in bridge section</td>
<td>Tapping beat Dramatic role play</td>
<td>Dancing &amp; singing slow to match pause</td>
<td>Drumming or tapping beat on knees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Potential for exploration of musical elements in the six songs

Creating music and lyrics

This section of the portrait explores the song writing processes for each of the six songs and analyses creative decisions made as I attempted to combine aesthetic interest, playful participation and musical development considerations. These processes are outlined for each song and correlations
and contrasts in my thinking and in the songs themselves are analysed. Music and lyrics are explored and interpreted in relation to professional and research literature.

*Little steam train*

Having decided to focus a train song around imaginary role play with narrative potential, the next step was to consider other train songs for young children. The song *I’m a train that goes*, sung to the tune of *Polly Wolly Doodle*, is a special favourite of many children. It has a starting and stopping structure, which allows children to move in response to its musical form and to make train sound effects with their voices. I decided to create a song incorporating similar movements and vocalisation. These forms of participation would allow the children to experience musical form as well as to structure their playful responses around the action of real trains, as they travel along their tracks and stop at stations to collect or deposit passengers or freight.

Once potential physical participation and musical form were decided upon, the next step was to create narrative lyrics which would invite the movement and sound responses of steam train play. The opening section of the song sets the scene, using first and second person dialogue so that the children place themselves into the narrative:

“Little steam train, you’re going out today,

Little steam train, we’ll help you get on your way.”
The second section continues to suggest a narrative by describing how a steam train gets under way:

“First we call the passengers – ‘All aboard!’

Then we dig the coal – ‘Dig, dig, dig;’

Then we toot the whistle – ‘Oooh oooh!’

Then the wheels go around and we’re on our way.”

This section is followed by four bars of steam sounds, after which the opening two lines are repeated. Musically this creates a ternary structure.

The distinct sections invite different movement responses, thus emphasising the song’s musical form. The first section can be sung while moving like a train, or while moving arms like train wheels in time with the beat. The second section is musically different to the first section as it has shorter musical phrases and a call and response structure. This provides for a range of styles of participation: movements, sound effects, dramatisation and/or singing. Children who don’t feel confident to sing much of the song can still join in with the actions and accompanying spoken responses, all of which have a vocal and motor aspect (“All aboard” with hands cupped to imitate a megaphone; digging coal and chanting “Dig, dig, dig”; tooting the whistle and pulling an imaginary handle).

Melodically the two sections are closely related, as the second section contains a fragment of the opening melodic phrase:
Rhythmically some differentiation between A and B sections is created by the fact that A begins with an anacrusis, whereas B begins on the first beat of the bar. This difference in the metrical structure helps to create a musical sense of difference to complement the difference in the actions and lyrics. The song has dotted rhythms (see figure 5.5 above), which gives it a feeling of movement and a cheerful mood.

The melody of Little steam train has a major tonality, chosen so that the song conveys a feeling of happy energy around the idea of travelling on a steam train. The melody is fairly challenging for young children to sing with accurate pitch. This is because it has some fairly wide intervals (6ths), which are hard for young children to pitch accurately (Flowers & Dunne-Sousa, 1990; Rutkowski, 1990) (see figure 5.5). It nevertheless has appeal.
as a song for dramatic and physical participation, so that children are actively engaged with the song even if they don’t sing.

When developing an early childhood music education curriculum, educators select songs for a variety of reasons – some for vocal or pitch awareness, some for beat or rhythm, and others for tempo, dynamics, tone colour or form. Therefore the fact that this song is hard to sing does not necessarily detract from its appropriateness for young children. Its main value lies in the potential for playful participation in a song about a favourite play interest of many children.

Musically the key elements which the children are experiencing through participation in the steam train song are tempo, structure and tone colour. The experience of tempo is particularly appropriate in songs about transportation or travel, as it links the speed of a vehicle’s movement with musical tempo. The experience of musical form or structure through action has been discussed above. Tone colour is experienced in this song through the different uses of the voice – singing, chanting, and train sound effects.

As the children participate in dramatic enactment of a train journey they are likely to be using their imaginations in linking this song to their life experiences with trains (train travel, playing with train sets, watching favourite DVDs). This use of imagination may also spark the children to suggest lyrics for new verses, perhaps about destinations for the little steam train.
Look around at the colours

Having decided that the focus of this song would be on identifying colours and that its focus age group was children under three years, the first creative decision was to devise an initial ‘hook’ lyrics phrase. After considerable thought, I chose “Look around at the colours”, a sentence which denotes an action relevant to colours. As colours are visual, it seemed logical for the key verb to relate to sight. The memory of Amy’s words as she proudly pointed out red provided a further rational for this decision.

The lyrics of the colours song are repetitive, therefore easy to remember for children whose language is still developing. Many songs for very young children have lyrics with few words which are repeated. Repetition of lyrics and melody also aid children’s memorisation of a song because of the clear structure that repetition creates. The first verse of the traditional song London Bridge is an example of this.

Once the first line of the song was created, experimentation with melodic and rhythmic phrases began. The song writing process from this point was the same as is for most of my songs. Once the opening lyrics are written, these are sung with a variety of melodic and rhythmic improvisations until a satisfactory melodic phrase is created. For Look around at the colours a major tonality was chosen. This seemed most appropriate for the topic, as the observation of the colours in the surrounding environment is a pleasurable experience. Here is the opening phrase:
From this point on lyrics and melody were developed in tandem. Because minimal lyrics are most appropriate in a song for very young children, repetition of a fragment of the opening sentence was used, to add rhythmic interest to the song’s first musical phrase: “Look around at the colours, look, look around”. For similar reasons, melodic repetition was also used.

The lyrics comprise repetition of this sentence three times – twice in succession, followed by a different sentence, then the first sentence again. Thus two short sentences make up the main body of the song, followed by a question which invites individual participation. The song’s form is ternary with a coda. The melody of the coda is derived from the opening melodic phrase (see figure 5.8 below).

One of the functions of repetitive lyrics is to allow children to practice the articulation of words. Songs with few words repeated often are commonly
used by professionals seeking to assist young children’s developing speech, as the rhythm and rhyme structures of a song, combined with melody and repetition, tend to accentuate articulation of words and phrases (Stackhouse, Pascoe & Gardner, 2006). Given children’s instinctive CM, songs of course also provide an enticing, enjoyable and natural way to practice articulation. Such songs provide a valuable resource for both speech and language acquisition; in particular the development of receptive language, as the lyrics reflects the actions children are doing, hence reinforcing meaning.

Look around at the colours has a mostly stepwise melodic structure – intervals of a 2nd, with some 3rds and 4ths (see figure 5.7 above). Young children are most likely to sing a song more accurately when intervals between notes are fairly narrow (Flowers & Dunne-Sousa, 1990; Rutkowski, 1990). The melody of the colours song also has a fairly limited pitch range, to make it more appropriate for children younger than four years (Forrai, 1988; Gordon, 1997; Rutkowski, 1996). Children of this age have a vocal range of about a fifth, approximately between D and A (just above middle C). Song melodies within this range are easier for children to sing with accurate pitch, as they lie within the speaking voice range of most children. The key of E major was chosen so that the melody would be mostly within this range.

The rhythm of the song is the same for each phrase. This is because, as with any song, the rhythm derives from the lyrics, and the lyrics are repetitive. In the B phrase the melody has the same contour as the A phrase, but is a tone
higher, thus forming a sequence (see figures 5.7 above and 5.9 below). The correspondence between repeated lyrics and melody, and the sequential repetition of rhythm and melodic contour enables young children to easily remember the structure of the song and this helps them to learn to sing it.

![Figure 5.9](image)

**Figure 5.9** B section phrase forms melodic sequence in Look around at the colours

The use of a question following the main eight bar verse has two purposes. Firstly, a question implies the need for an answer; therefore it encourages children to interact individually within the song. Secondly, questions are often found in traditional call and response songs, which are commonly used by music educators to encourage solo singing. The aural/vocal approach to music education based on the pedagogical philosophy of Zoltan Kodaly advocates the use of call and response songs to assist children’s pitch and singing development (Forrai, 1988). However as this song was intended for children aged three and under, a question was used to invite interaction which did not have to be singing.

**First space song: What does an astronaut need?**

Question and answer, or call and response, used in Look around at the colours, is a structure I have used in several songs because of its interactive
potential. I experimented with this structure in creating a song during fieldwork, but with quite different outcomes to Look around at the colours.

Journal: 11 August, 2009

This morning Jeannie read a simple illustrated book about space travel and the planets of our solar system to the children. She asked them what they knew about space. I offered to jot their responses down and type them out for her. My song writing ‘antenna’ had been switched on by seeing the photos and reading about the children’s space play, so the children’s comments were of great interest to me as well as to their teachers. Below are some of the things they said. Nearly all the contributors to the discussion were from the graduating group.

Ethan: Space men go in space rockets.

Phil: Rockets blast off.

Alison: There are planets.

Jeannie (teacher): Which planet do we live on?

Bella: The earth.

Ethan: Space men need the biggest rocket to go up in space.

Tina: They need special jackets.

Gemma: There’s lots of stars.

Brian: Where do they land?

Cherry: There are lots of planets.

Bella: The Milky Way.
Madeleine: Stars come out at night.

*Jeannie*: Why do they? Why can’t we see them in the day?

Katey: It needs to be dark.

Jeannie encouraged the children to ask questions about what they would like to know about space. As is often the case the children made statements more than asking questions. However Jeannie suggested a few questions which aroused their interest and some further comments. Then some questions flowed.

Bella: How do they get up in space?

Gemma: How do they get into a rocket?

Ethan: How do they get into their suits?

Jeannie: Why do astronauts float in space?

Roz (staff): How do they eat?

Jeannie: *Why can’t we visit the sun?*

*Ethan*: ‘Cause it’s way too hot.

Jeannie: How are stars made?

Jeannie: Where does the sun go at night?

*Some answers (didn’t catch who from)*: It goes to sleep.

It goes behind the clouds. It goes to a different house.

Ethan: I used to live on Jupiter. It was really big. I went on a big space rocket.
Figure 5.10 Child’s drawing and scribed description (a)

Figure 5.11 Child’s drawing and scribed description (b)
Figure 5.12 Child’s drawing and scribed description (c)

"My spaceship is flying. It's next to Jupiter and the sun."

Figure 5.13 Child’s drawing and scribed description (d)

"This is my house in space, it took a long time to get there, we have a special car in space, it has a lot of smoke, cause it's so hot, there is a ship in the sky, a space one."

189
The children’s ideas, as shown in illustrations 5.1 to 5.5 above, reveal how much information about space has been gleaned from sources such as books, TV or conversations with adults, and has been filtered through their imaginations to pose ideas or theories about space. The themes of interest which were evident in the children’s play and conversations over the next several weeks were clear examples of their use of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005) as they took this knowledge and shaped their understandings about space through imaginative social play. Space seemed like an excellent topic to create a song around.

Over the next few field visits many ideas were drawn from observations of children’s play, drawings (such as those above) and conversations, for use in a space song. Themes of interest which emerged from this data were: the size of space, the special equipment an astronaut needs, travel by rocket, and the existence of stars and planets. Ethan’s statement about Jupiter could
be viewed as an example of children wanting to have agency (Corsaro, 2005) in a situation that fascinates their imagination.

During the coming weeks Ethan emerged as quite a leader in the space play. He and Cory spent a lot of time browsing books about space. Their conversations provided many valuable ideas for song lyrics. These two boys were especially fascinated by space travel, spending extended periods of time together poring over illustrations of different space craft and asking questions about the equipment astronauts were using. Their interest led to a focus on developing lyrics for the song around the technical equipment involved in space travel.

The lyrics of the song What does an astronaut need? began with a question: “What does an astronaut need to fly into space?” The planned format of the song was a question and answer structure, with the children offering answers so that a new version would be created each time the song was sung. A question and answer structure was chosen to provide the children with opportunities to find answers to their questions about space. The experience of children’s enthusiasm for answering the question posed in the song Look around at the colours also influenced this choice of format.

The melody for the question ended on the median of the major key, thus implying the need for resolution.
This was written so that the musical ‘grammar’ would mirror the linguistic grammar of a question and answer structure. The song was therefore binary in its musical form, with the question and answer phrases repeated.

In the ‘birth’ section of this portrait the introduction of this song is described and analysed, showing how the children’s responses led to leaving it aside and creating a completely new song about space. Analysis of the melodic and linguistic form of this song, also contained in that section, provides several compelling reasons for its limited success in engaging the children in the Eager Beavers group.

*Space is a really big place*

In starting afresh to create a song about space, a different musical approach to similar textual material was adopted. Noting that the children showed an imaginative fascination in the seemingly super-natural aspects of space, I used expressive language at the start of the song to engage their imaginations. The children’s limited engagement with What does an astronaut need? suggested the need to create a melody that was more aesthetically satisfying than the earlier attempt. The creation of metrical and rhythmic irregularity became a way to create a sense of surprise which
might add to the song’s musical interest. Consideration of the predictability of the lyric structure of the earlier song showed that a sense of narrative progression through the song might also be used to add interest. The challenge was to incorporate these ideas while still retaining a structure which would provide opportunities for the children to contribute their own ideas to the song.

Revisiting field notes was a reminder that the process of creating a song around the play interests of the Eager Beavers had arisen from observations of children’s interest in numbers and size. This led to the incorporation of mathematical language at the start of the new space song, and to a focus on quantity and size. Hence the first line: “There are millions of stars...in space, ‘cause space is a really big place”. The line “space is a really big place” is repeated often in the song. The internal rhyme in this line is one of its strengths, as children seemed to find it easy to remember and musically satisfying to sing or say.

![Figure 5.16 First (A) section of Space is a really big place](image)
The melody of this second space song is major in tonality and can be sung in the keys of either C or D to accommodate young children’s vocal range. A major tonality was chosen as it best contributed to creating a feeling of wonder at the magic of space, and excitement at the thought of space travel.

The verse has a ternary melodic structure and involves repetition: A B1 A B2. The B1 phrase ends on the dominant, so is harmonically unresolved, whereas the B2 phrase ends on the tonic, hence creating a perfect cadence, which gives a feeling of resolution and a possible end point for the song.

The bridge section, which builds a narrative of dramatised space travel and leads to a chanted countdown, differs both rhythmically and melodically to the verse. It has repeated words on the same notes, and climbs stepwise, to create dramatic tension in anticipation of an imaginary lift off (see Figure 5.4).

After the chanted countdown the song concludes with a repetition of the melody of the verse with lyrics, which bring the narrative to a close: “Then we’re zooming along, in space, ‘cause space is a really big place”. The use of this syncopated rhythm, which creates an element of surprise through the use of a rest within a phrase, was done to add musical interest (See figure 5.16 above).
If a dinosaur came to your house

Young children’s interest in dinosaurs has some similarities to their interest in space. These two topics excite their imaginations as they are completely outside their life experiences. Both also encompass dimensions of great size and distance. Space is vast beyond our comprehension, and dinosaurs lived long ago, in a past far beyond young children’s understandings of time. Many dinosaurs too were much larger in size than any creatures in existence now. The creation of a song about dinosaurs was aimed at tapping into similar motivations in children’s interests. Therefore both songs provide opportunities for children to explore huge sizes and distances, partly through narrative.

Because If a dinosaur came to your house was inspired by another song, its creation was influenced by the lyrics and musical form of that song. At the start of its creation some time was spent working to develop a question which could be a lyric ‘hook’ for the song. A question and answer format had been successfully used in Look around at the colours and seemed an appropriate technique to use to invite children’s imaginative role play.

There are many examples of traditional children’s songs and rhymes which focus on a question, such as Frère Jacques. The question created for the dinosaur song allows the children to consider a problem and devise a solution. The lyrics allow the children to choose where to hide from the dinosaur, and the song ends by affirming that there are no dinosaurs in our
world any more. This is important as the children can explore potential
danger in the song but can conclude it with a feeling of control and safety.

The melody is written in a minor tonality, and in the key of F melodic
minor. As the melody ranges between middle C and A flat (a range of a
sixth), the song is mostly located around the bottom of young children’s
tessitura. Both tonality and pitch range were selected to create an
atmosphere of suspense. For this reason also a slow tempo is used, in
keeping with the heavy footsteps of a very large dinosaur. The form of the
song incorporates melodic phrases of different lengths, with rests between
phrases and fermata on final notes of some phrases. This was done in order
to strengthen the narrative structure of the song, as well as to enhance the
mood of suspense or tension.

The rhythm of this song was created to follow the natural accent patterns of
the lyrics, but also to further highlight key words through rhythmic stresses
and time values. For example in the opening bars longer note values are
used for the phrase “your house” than for the preceding lyrics. This means
that “your house” is stressed by the feeling of the musical phrase slowing
down. These words are important for children imagining the scenario of a
dinosaur coming to their house.
Provision is made for the children’s ideas (where to hide), so that they can participate in shaping the song’s narrative. Hiding is a universally popular young children’s game, so this song is likely to link with common play interests. In previous research (Niland, 2005) I found that children were most engaged with songs related to their play interests. Having to decide where to hide encourages children to formulate a mental picture of their house in order to find potential hiding spaces. Therefore this song allows the children to make meaningful connections with their own lives (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Office of Child Care NSW, 2006).

At the end of each verse there are short phrases, each with a fermata, so that the rhythm is interrupted, creating a feeling of anticipation. These are followed by a spoken exclamation (“oh oh!”), which provides a vocal contrast, and links via a musical bridge to the next rendition of the song and the continuation of the narrative.

The bridge, which can also be the introduction to the song, consists of the lyrics “Stomp, stomp, stomp, stomp!” The melody steps down over four notes from tonic to dominant, following a melodic minor tonality (flattened...
6th and 7th). This creates a feeling of an imperfect cadence, which builds tension at the beginning of song and between verses (see figure 5.1 earlier).

At the end of the song, after an indeterminate number of renditions, depending on the children’s interest, there is provision for a spoken improvised statement about the fact that there are no dinosaurs in the world any more. Young children’s emergent understanding of the difference between pretence and reality (Frahsek, Mack, Mack, Pfalz-Blezinger & Knopf, 2010) is used to provide a comic resolution of tension.

The little pigs’ chorus

The little pigs’ chorus, the second song composed for the Eager Beavers, is similar in some ways in its narrative focus to If a dinosaur came to your house. In these two songs the lyrics portray the singers as taking control against an opponent and actively solving a problem. The lyrics of both songs provide opportunities for the children to be active agents (Corsaro, 2005) in the situations described. In the dinosaur song this involves the creation of lyrics. In The little pigs’ chorus the lyrics were not written with any thought of adaptations, they simply convey the success of the little pigs in overcoming the threat from the Big Bad Wolf, so that the children can identify with the triumph of small over big (in terms of size and strength).

Journal: 20 October, 2009

During October, preparations for the graduation of the oldest Eager Beavers were in full swing. On my next visit to Schubert Road after
Dana had agreed that a song would make a good finale for the children’s performance of ‘The three little pigs’, I watched a rehearsal during group time and videoed it so that I could revisit it. I chatted with some of the older children over lunch, telling them how much I’d enjoyed the play and asking if they thought it would be a good idea to have a song at the end. Gemma, Jessica and Ethan said they’d like to sing a song.

I asked them what the song might say and Ethan chanted “Hooray, hooray, hooray, the wolf has gone away,” in a strongly accented 6/8 meter.

Gemma said, “Yeah, hooray the big bad wolf is gone or something like that.”

Jessica said “Yeah that’s good.”

On the way home in the car I sang Ethan’s lines, experimenting with rhythm and melody. While I was singing, trying different combinations of lyrics and melodies, I thought about how to make the song catchy. The lyrics would need to be logical and simple, but just a little bit musical or poetic and not completely predictable. I decided to make the lyrics dialogue for the pigs to sing, but for other children to join in with as well. This would integrate the song into
the play, enabling the actors to sing in their roles, but would also allowing for audience participation.

I thought about blues melodic/harmonic structures, and a way of using the lyric ideas gleaned from the children which could perhaps be syncopated in a catchy way. I was aiming for something that felt good to repeat, with a strong rhythmic feel that would lend itself to dancing. Dana and I had agreed that the children might like to dance and sing as the finale of the play. I sang as I drove that afternoon for about an hour, pulling over to jot down ideas in my note book several times.

*The little pigs’ chorus* uses a 4/4 time signature, appropriate for a lively dance of victory such as the triumphant little pigs might do. Ethan’s words were used at the start of the song, but the rhythm was varied, so that his words were extended upon. The song begins “Hooray, hooray, we’re glad to say, that the big bad wolf has gone away.” First person was used to convey the pig’s emotions, and to make the song a continuation of the narrative of Dana’s play. To strengthen this further, words from the traditional story that are so familiar to many children were used: “He [the wolf] huffed and he puffed” and “not by the hairs of our chinny chin chin”. The lyrics represent the little pigs, victorious over the wolf, reflecting proudly on what had happened and on their actions.
The rhythmic structure means that the accented words on the first beat of each bar are mostly key words in conveying the narrative. The melody is major in tonality and begins with a strong feeling of a perfect cadence, stylistically similar to a fanfare, giving the song a celebratory feeling to match the lyrics. This accompanies the words “hooray, hooray”. The song structure is AABA, so that it also ends with the feeling of a fanfare.

![Figure 5.18](image)

**Figure 5.18** Opening phrase of *Little pigs’ chorus*

*I’m a drummer in a band*

The focus of *I’m a drummer in a band* is on the children taking on a role, as in *The little pigs’ chorus*. The intention was for one child, or maybe two, to be the drummers, while the rest of the group would play imaginary drums on their knees, as the sound of many drums would make listening to rhythm or tone colour impossible. Therefore this song, like The little pigs chorus, features some children more prominently (either through costume or the use of a drum) but includes all children in singing and physical participation.

While undertaking this research I became aware that when writing a song my thinking moves between several different perspectives. Sometimes I think as a music educator, considering what musical concepts a song might highlight, or how I can make a song singable for very young voices. At other times I think as an early childhood educator, considering how a song
might relate to children’s interests, how they might play with elements of the song, and what meaning children may take from the song. At other times I think as a musician/song writer, considering which tonality, melodic structure or rhythm is most aesthetically satisfying to me.

Song writing is thus a process of creative integration of ideas influenced by these diverse perspectives. The relative dominance of each perspective varies depending on the song. For *I’m a drummer in a band* music education was the strongest influence, because the motivation to write it arose from music education curriculum planning.

The creation of this song began with consideration of what potential for participation the song might provide for children. The decision was made to create a song with alternate musical phrases of singing and drumming. From a music education perspective this would allow the children to focus on a specific rhythm pattern in their drumming. It would also allow for either solo or tutti (everyone together) drumming. For the purposes of music education it would also allow the children to grasp the form of the song through changes in response and tone colour between singing and speaking, and between singing and drumming. The lyrics would need to be simple and repetitive, making them very easy to learn. This would encourage the children to focus on drumming, which research indicated was likely to be the most engaging aspect of the song (Young, 2003).
Although the decision to write this song arose to fulfil music education objectives, the writing of its lyrics was influenced by early childhood and creative artist’s perspectives. These led to a decision to approach drumming through dramatic play. To achieve this, lyrics that went beyond simple description of the action of drumming would be needed, so that children would be encouraged to take on an imaginative role within the song.

Hence the first line - “I’m a drummer in a band”. This line allows children to imagine drummers and perhaps drum kits or other types of drums seen in their lives. The literature on children’s cultures, in particular the commodification of these, indicates that the images this song may create for children are likely to be strongly influenced by their experience of mass market musical commodities (Lee, Bartolic, & Vandewater, 2009; Christakis, 2009).

Although in the A section of the song the line “I’m a drummer in a band” is repeated four times, the drumming pattern between each singing phrase can potentially change, allowing the drummer(s) to create their own rhythm patterns. In the B section there is opportunity for some lyrical variation. This allows children to select their style of drumming: loud, soft, fast, slow, or gradations of these. The inclusion of these choices arose from music education, as they allow the children to explore the musical elements of tempo, dynamics and possibly tone colour.
The lyrics in the B section end with “and then I stop!” This ending was also influenced by music education principles. Repertoire for young children often includes songs which contrast between sound and silence, movement and stillness and such songs are greatly enjoyed by young children (Feierabend, 1996). Games of moving and stopping are very engaging for young children, therefore from an early childhood perspective, the song provides potential for play. From a music education perspective, the contrast provided heightens children’s listening skills and aural awareness, both important foundational musical skills (Bridges, 1994).

The song’s melody is based on a 12 bar blues structure. The melody is minor in tonality, built on the tonic, subdominant seventh and dominant seventh chords of E minor. It is repetitive, just as the lyrics are repetitive. The pitch range of the melody is a minor sixth, from B to G, at the lower end of the vocal range of most three to five year olds. The blues style was chosen as it represents a style often used in rock songs, performed by bands with drummers. The melody has a very narrow pitch range, which is potentially easy to sing with accurate pitch.

![Figure 5.19 Opening phrase of I’m a drummer in a band](image)

**Figure 5.19** Opening phrase of *I’m a drummer in a band*
The version of the song recorded on an audio CD for Schubert Road Child Care Centre contained no drumming sounds, just my voice. In the A section a speaking voice was used to chant “One, two, three” for the drumming phrases, conveying a rhythm pattern of three crotchet beats. This was done to give the children the opportunity to tap in time with a speech rhythm. This idea arose from music education goals. For young children, chanted words, and particularly numbers, can provide a model of simple rhythm patterns (Forrai, 1988). Once the children are confident in playing this, they can be encouraged either to improvise other spoken patterns to accompany the song, in the style of jazz scatting (improvisation on neutral syllables) or to play the number patterns or other improvised patterns with no spoken accompaniment. The use of “one, two, three” gives an educational starting point, which was intended to be useful for Dana and the children in the Eager Beavers group. The use of numbers also gave them an opportunity to participate while becoming familiar with the song.

**Comparisons of musical features**

Table 5.3 below is a brief summary of the main musical features of each song. Data is organised in this way for the purpose of drawing comparisons in the musical style of the six songs.
The narrative analysis of the gestation of the six songs reveals many similarities in my song writing style, particularly in relation to the musical forms used. These are evident in table 5.3 above. All six songs have a structure where the opening phrase/line or first 2 phrases/lines (A section) are repeated. In Space is a really big place the repetition is varied at the end, rhythmically and melodically, so that the second time the phrase has a more definite musical resolution (the melody ends on the tonic).

Major keys are used for the melodies of four of the six songs. Many children’s songs in the early childhood repertoire prevalent in early childhood settings in Australia have major melodies; therefore this tonality is part of my musical cultural background as well as that of the children at Schubert Road. *I’m a drummer in a band* uses a minor, 12 bar blues, harmonic structure. If a dinosaur came to your house is also in a minor key. For all six songs the choice of tonality related to the subject matter of the song and the appropriate mood or image the song is intended to convey.
All six songs begin with an anacrusis. This is a common feature of many songs for children from English language cultural traditions, although not all such songs begin in this way. The grammatical forms used in writing lyrics account for this stylistic similarity. The communicative, meaning-making function of song lyrics is most effective when the key words of the song are sung on accented beats within the song’s metrical structure.

The rhythms created through the lyrics were written with the intention of setting key words on strong beats, so that these words would stand out for the children and help to engage their interest in the topic of each song. Some example of this are:

(strong beat is underlined)

“If a dinosaur came to your house”

“I’m a drummer in a band”

“Little steam train”

“That the Big Bad Wolf has gone away”.

The use of anacrusis was also necessary in some instances in order to ensure that the natural meter of a word was reflected in the musical rhythm. The opening of *The little pigs’ chorus* is an example of this, as “Hooray” is a word whose accent is on the second syllable.

The lyrics of all six songs are written in either first or second person, to create an interactive, conversational style (“little steam train, you’re going out today”) or to encourage children to imagine themselves in the scenarios
of the songs (“I’m a drummer in a band”; “If a dinosaur came to your house”).

**Comparisons of forms of engagement**

The four songs which were created before this research arose from an intention to elicit children’s active participation. These songs were: Look around at the colours, If a dinosaur came to your house, Little steam train, *I’m a drummer in a band*. It is interesting that the two songs in which this wasn’t the case are those songs written specifically for the children of the Eager Beavers group, arising out of interests observed during fieldwork.

Three of the four songs created before this research have potential for the children to contribute their ideas to lyric variations and narrative development (Little steam train, If a dinosaur came to your house, *I’m a drummer in a band*), although the drummer song is more limited from an imaginative play perspective than the others. Space is a really big place, created during the research, also has this capacity, but only in the bridge section. The little pigs’ *chorus* and Look around at the colours don’t include this provision at all, although if a child was to lead the singing of the colours song she could select which colour she would like other children to find.

If a dinosaur came to your house has the most potential for the creation of a narrative. The use of a question in the opening lyrics actively invites children to imagine a narrative. The knowledge that dinosaurs no longer
exist often means that children view them as mythical monsters. Therefore many children enjoy imagining fantasy narratives about dinosaurs.

Space is a really big place has narrative potential mainly because of the bridge section, which describes a sequence of actions dramatizing the beginning of an astronaut’s journey. Verses could be added which follow this section so that the lyrics are adapted to tell a story. For example, instead of “There are…” at the beginning of each line, “We see…” could be substituted, thus continuing the concept of the children participating in the narrative of the song contained in the bridge section, which begins “So put on your space suit…”.

Reflections on conceptions and gestations of the six songs

Reflection on the pre-birth stages of each song through this narrative portrait provides insights that support the value of systematic inquiry for creative arts practitioners such as song writers (Barrett, 2007). For example data generation and analysis reveals some commonly used song writing techniques and illuminates potential for exploring a wider range of musical styles in terms of tonality, rhythm and form.

Systematic journaling around the song writing process for these six songs has led to insights into the role of the diverse perspectives of researcher and educator in my song writing. Research data shows that that the multiple roles theorised in designing this research are in fact the same multiple roles which influenced the processes and outcomes of song writing. My previous
research (Niland, 2005) into young children’s engagement with songs was a form of action research undertaken to reflect on and improve my practice as an early childhood music educator (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). One of the key outcomes of that research was increased awareness of the way reflective pedagogy (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Rinaldi, 2006) is a form of research, and hence that the processes of education can and should also be viewed as research. Another key outcome was the desire to create my own songs utilising professional and research literature and experience, which is a focus of this thesis.

**Introducing the six songs to the Eager Beavers: Births**

Although four of the six songs were created prior to the commencement of this research and had previously been sung with children, this section focuses only on exploring the births of the songs at Schubert Road Child Care Centre. A selection of eight of my original songs was sung to the staff of the Eager Beavers room at a meeting held before the commencement of field visits. Staff members were asked to select the songs they thought the children might particularly enjoy and to teach them to the children prior to my first visit. An audio CD was provided (my solo voice) so that they could learn the songs. A few weeks after the meeting with staff, when I phoned to arrange to start my field visits, Dana informed me that the children “loved the little train song”.
Songs created prior to field research

Songs introduced by a staff member prior to my first visit

Dana taught the children Little steam train and *I’m a drummer in a band*. She used the CD at first when she sang with them, until she became familiar with each of the songs. Dana told me that she chose *I’m a drummer in the band* because she enjoyed playing percussion instruments with the children. She thought the children would like this song because of its instrumental focus.

On the first field visit two of the graduating group of children, Gemma and Jessica, told me “We heard you on the CD before you came.” So when I met the children for the first time my name, voice and several songs were already known to the children in the Eager Beavers group.

During the first week of field visits Dana mentioned how much she thought the children enjoyed the songs, but unfortunately no further conversations were held in relation to exactly how she had introduced them. My initial hearing of Dana and the children singing these songs, which took place on the first day of field visits, yielded significant early insights into the prevailing musical culture of the Eager Beavers. The singing of Little steam train and *I’m a drummer in a band* on this visit revealed key elements of the centre’s musical culture, which were explored in Chapter Four. The children sang the two songs fast and loudly, combining this with fast, energetic physical actions. No drums were used for *I’m a drummer in a band*. Instead Dana extended the imaginative role play inherent in the song.
by asking the children to play imaginary drums, using their hands to tap their thighs.

Fast tempo and loud dynamics were more prevalent in the life cycles of these two songs than in any other of the six songs. This could relate to the fact that the songs were introduced to the children by Dana, but it could also relate to the focus of the lyrics and actions of these two particular songs, which both invite speed, loudness and physical energy more than any of the other four songs do.

**Songs introduced by the song writer/researcher**

The births of two of the six songs - Look around at the colours and If a dinosaur came to your house - occurred because of my observations of children’s interests during structured group music sessions. Look around at the colours was one of the songs previously sung with the staff, but not one they selected for the children. However on the second day of fieldwork, during the first group sing-along I led, some children’s responses led to the decision to introduce this song.

*Journal, 28 July, 2009 (a)*

*We sang ‘Baa, baa, black sheep’ at the request of several children.*

Then someone suggested singing about pink sheep instead of black sheep. Several children called out different colours with great enthusiasm. This interest in singing about sheep of different colours started in my first sing-along and remained popular on nearly every
visit from then on. Today, after singing ‘Baa, baa, black sheep’ (and pink, red, purple, green, orange sheep), Alison, a five year old, asked “Do you know the rainbow song?”

“Do you mean this one?” I asked her, and launched into ‘Sing a rainbow’ (Hamilton, 1955), a fairly well-known children’s song in English language cultures which is featured on many popular CDs for children. Alison nodded. I wasn’t quite sure of its chord structure but I knew the song well, so I began to sing and strum. Several children joined in at the beginning and the end, but most just listened. I judged by their rapt attention and smiles of recognition that this song was a favourite of many children.

Sing a rainbow is quite a hard song to sing. It is long for a young children’s song, has fairly complex lyrics, a wide vocal range and some harmonic modulation. Its popularity with young children is possibly related to familiarity, due to its widespread inclusion in children’s TV shows such as Australia’s Playschool (ABC) and in recordings of children’s songs. It may also be appealing because it is more melodically and linguistically sophisticated than most songs for young children. The lyrics use imagery to paint a picture which encourages children to think about the meaning of the words in an imaginative way. And of course the song is about rainbows, a phenomenon which always fascinates young children.
Given the interest of many of the children in ‘Sing a rainbow’, I followed it by singing ‘Look around at the colours’. By the second rendition about half of the children were vying for turns to point out the stated colour and I could see most of them looking around the room to find it. After about four renditions I noted that no-one was joining in with the singing. “See if you can help me sing,” I said and a few of the older children did.

When it was time shortly afterwards for outdoor play, Gemma and Ethan asked if we could keep singing. “I enjoyed those songs” said Gemma. During outdoor play I heard staff member Jeannie humming the beginning of the colours song. Smiling to myself I felt a sneaking sense of pride. “This life cycle is off to a good start,” I thought.

The other song whose introduction to the Eager Beavers was unplanned but came about in response to observations of a structured group music session was If a dinosaur came to your house. This song was mentioned to staff at the pre-fieldwork meeting, but they agreed they had not observed any particular interest in dinosaurs amongst the children, so it was not included on the recording. One day, however, when Jeannie put on a CD for movement, the most popular track with many of the children was a dinosaur dance. Most of them roared, growled, stamped their feet and made claws as they pretended to be dinosaurs with great interest and enthusiasm. The
noise was overwhelming, so much so that the CD was almost inaudible. Many of the oldest children, such as Brian, Cory, Ethan, Lola and Gemma, as well as some younger boys like the two Andrews and Phil, interacted with each other in mini dramatic play scenarios. “I’m tyrannosaurus, Roar!!!” exclaimed Cory. It was obvious that dinosaurs did stimulate imaginative responses from the children so introduction of If a dinosaur came to your house to the Eager Beavers group seemed appropriate. An opportunity arose the following week at the sing along before lunch.

**Journal, 6 October, 2009**

“Can you make dinosaur footsteps on your knees like this?” I said, demonstrating heavy, slow movements with my arms on my knees. They all joined in and I began to sing: “Stomp, stomp, stomp, stomp!” A few of the older children such as Jessica, Gemma, Cory, Ethan, joined in with these words. Then I began the verse: “If a dinosaur came to your house, what would you do?” I could see many pairs of eyes widen and watch my face intently, wondering what was coming next. As I continued to sing most children followed my dramatic actions (pretending to hide their face behind their hands, putting a hand to an ear to listen) and I observed that the short phrases and fermata (also effectively pausing the action of the narrative) kept their rapt attention on me. For the first two renditions I suggested the hiding places, but in the third rendition Brian called out “in the garage under the car!” and after that I was inundated with shouted suggestions.
Unfortunately we were called for lunch after five renditions. One of the other staff sat down in front of the children to lead a transition rhyme, sending the children off two at a time to wash their hands for lunch. *A group of children requested ‘the witch song’, a favourite rhyme,* in which the children are magically transformed into imaginary beings by a witch. The staff member carried on the dinosaur interest by turning many of the children, especially boys, into dinosaurs.

Look around at the colours and *If a dinosaur came to your house,* the two songs introduced after observing interest in their topics, are also similar because both encourage the children to participate interactively with me or whoever is the singing leader – for the former to identify a colour and for the latter to develop a narrative about hiding from dinosaurs. Data on the births of both songs showed clear evidence of the children’s immediate interest in participating in these interactive aspects.

The interactions involved in these two songs can be viewed as forms of CM. In *Look around at the colours* the interaction is communicative (finding the answer to a question), but not specifically musical. Significantly the experience of researching the life of this song with the children of the Eager Beavers group led to the development of ideas for making the communication aspect of the song more musical (see later in this chapter). The interaction involved in the dinosaur song is more musical, as it involves the children synchronising beat and vocal quality.
(dynamics) with each other to dramatise the narrative and in contributing ideas for lyric variations to develop the narrative.

**Songs created during field research**

Because the four songs which were composed prior to this research had previously been sung with many groups of children, I already had some expectations of the responses each song might elicit. I had been through the stage of introducing them to children for the very first time, and experienced the general unsureness which characterises the first sharing of a new song. This unsureness involves wondering whether children’s interest will be engaged, whether they will participate vocally or physically, whether they will remain interested for several renditions, and whether they will offer ideas to adapt or extend the songs. At the time of introducing these four songs to both staff and children of the Eager Beavers room I had an inner belief in their potential to engage children’s interest and active participation.

This contrasts with my inner feelings about the potential of the two songs composed during field research, Space is a really big place and *The little pigs’ chorus*, which had their first introductions to children with the Eager Beavers. The experience of introducing the space song in particular to the children provided valuable insights into the experience of unsureness. As outlined in the previous section of this portrait, two attempts were made to compose a song about space.
The first space song, What does an astronaut need?, had a question and answer format, to allow for interaction and creative decision making by the children. The question was “What does an astronaut need to fly in space?” The answer was “An astronaut needs a ..... [children to supply]”.

Journal, 11 August, 2009

We first sang the new space song during group sing-along held after lunch. The older children in particular listened with interest and several were quick to call out suggestions. “A space ship,” said Cory. “Wings,” said Madeleine. “Something on the back” said Heidi. We digressed to discuss what this might be. “For breathing,” said Cory. After singing this song a few times through quite a few children were getting restless, so I initiated a countdown from 10 to zero, which most children chanted with loud enthusiasm, and we pretended to blast off into space.

Revisiting of data on the children’s responses to this song over the next few days showed that the song itself had not engaged the children musically, although the subject matter and the opportunity to suggest things about space travel did interest many of them. The structure of the song was merely a series of questions and answers, which seemed to be a limitation, as there was no sense of either narrative or of musical structure and resolution. It also seemed that the song needed more potential for musical responses in addition to singing, to create more musical interest.
In comparing the birth of this space song with the experience of introducing other new songs to children, it seemed that my instinctive feeling about a song’s potential appeal is often borne out by experience. In general the writing of a song includes visualisation of potential responses from children, based on past experiences as a music educator. With What does an astronaut need? I had envisaged that the children would enjoy contributing their ideas about space, in the light of the conversations heard between the children and Jeannie. However consideration of their responses to the introduction of the astronaut song revealed little spark of musical interest. Further analysis of the song was needed to investigate the reasons for its limited potential to engage the children. Reflection on my instinctive feelings about the song revealed a lack of belief in its aesthetic appeal.

Insights gained through this research so far, resulting from study of the literature as well as from generation and interpretation of data, highlight the role of songs and singing as social communication and shared meaning-making (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009; Barrett, 2003a). This would indicate that the engagement and aesthetic interest of the song leader influence the responses of children. In the case of What does an astronaut need? my lack of engagement and confidence may serve to explain in part the limited engagement shown by the children.

The song was sung on one more visit, as often on a second occasion the children show recognition of their previous experience of a new song. When this happens, the children’s responses and suggestions indicate that
they are thinking about the previous occasion and extending their ideas. The second sharing of the astronaut song didn’t give any impression of the children’s interest building. Hence the song writing process began anew and by the next visit Space is a really big place was completed.

Journal, 20 August, 2009

It was a cool day, cloudy with intermittent rain, so the children stayed indoors. The routine was varied during the morning, as a photographer was at the centre to take the annual photos of all the children, individually and in their room groups. When I entered the Eager Beavers room I noticed Ethan and Cory in the book corner poring over books about space. I sat down with them and they both thrust books at me. “Read this,” said Cory. “No my book first,” said Ethan. I read both books to the boys, and they asked lots of questions about the illustrations. Ethan was very interested in different types of space craft. Cory was fascinated by gravity and weightlessness.

After we’d finished browsing three or four books Ethan suggested to Cory that they build a rocket. So they moved over to the block area and got started. This play lasted quite a long time. Phil and Kai joined them to ‘travel’ to space.
Dana noticed this play and got out a parachute at group time, which she pretended was a space ship. The children all sat on it and Dana led them in a very noisy drama experience of a voyage to outer space. She asked lots of open ended questions so that the children could guide the journey, which several of the oldest children did with great enthusiasm. “Look I can see Mars! I can see Jupiter! I can see aliens!” The space conversations continued through lunch and excited interest in space was so palpable in the room that it seemed like a very good day to introduce a new song about space.

After lunch I led a sing-along as usual. Following a few requests for familiar favourites I began to sing the new space song. Because it is quite repetitive several of the older children, such as Cory, Jessica...
and Gemma, memorised it quickly and joined in for the second half of the opening verse. I sang the first verse I had written and then asked the children what else we might see in space as well as stars.

“Planets,” said Ethan. “Moons,” said Gemma. So the second verse became “There are planets and moons... in space, ’cause space is a really big place”. After the two verses I then sang the final section of the song, which allows the children to dramatise space travel. There was lots of very enthusiastic participation in this, especially the countdown and blast off, which became very loud.

I had placed my voice recorder on the window sill near where we were all sitting for group time. When we finished singing and the children moved off to rest or play quietly I retrieved the recorder and Ethan noticed. He asked what it was so I told him, and played back some of our singing. He asked if I could record him on the ‘space recorder’, as he called it. So I recorded a bit of our conversation and played it back. Ethan was very amused to hear himself and his friend Cory. I had to play it to him several times.

In contrast to the introduction of the two space songs, the other song which was composed for the Eager Beavers, The little pigs’ chorus, needed no revisions after its birth. From its first introduction the children showed strong interest in singing and participating. The little pigs’ chorus was the last of the six songs to be introduced to the children, as its composition only took place in October, the fourth month of field visits, by which time I was
a familiar presence at the centre and had developed strong relationships with many children. By that time too, several of my songs were quite well known and popular with many children in the Eager Beavers group.

The instant interest in *The little pigs’ chorus* was most likely influenced by the general excitement around preparations for the graduation celebrations, which were dominating the focus of staff and children during that period of fieldwork. However, given its timing during the fieldwork, it is also possible that the composition of *The little pigs’ chorus* was influenced by the research processes already undergone. For the songs composed before this research I had been influenced by my knowledge and experiences as a practitioner, with some knowledge gleaned by my previous research which was very limited in scope. By the time I began to compose Space is a really big place and *The little pigs’ chorus* I had significantly enhanced my practitioner knowledge through the research processes undertaken in this project so far. Not only had I completed an extensive review of literature, I had also spent the previous three months generating and interpreting data on children’s responses to my songs. *The little pigs’ chorus*, similarly to Space is a really big place, is therefore an example of practice-led research (Barrett & Bolt, 2007). The creation of each of these songs was simultaneously an act of research, a product of research and a focus for data generation in the field.

After being present for rehearsals of the play *The three little pigs* and conversing with Dana and some of the graduating children about creating a
song for the play, the new song was completed in time for the next field visit. *The little pigs’ chorus* was introduced during group singing time just before lunch. The children listened with interest and joined in after a few renditions. Dana organised everyone to stand in a circle, so we could work out some dance moves. The children’s suggestions were: “Hooray”: arms up and down; “We’re glad to say”: spin on the spot; “The big bad wolf has gone away”: one leg at a time back, opposite arm back (backwards striding on the spot with arms swinging). Gemma, Lola, Molly, Ethan and Cory suggested these moves. They were quite tricky for the younger children. I noted in my journal that day that it would be interesting to see if these moves become part of the song (In fact they didn’t).

A CD of the song, unaccompanied, was provided, so that Dana and the children could listen to it and get to know the song when I wasn’t present. Over the next week they listened to it every time they practised the play and used it to sing along with.

The children’s initial engagement when first introduced to the two songs composed for the Eager Beavers, *Space is a really big place* and *The little pigs’ chorus*, should be considered in relation to the fact that the focus of each (space and the graduation play) was prominent in the curriculum at the time and thus centre staff as well as children were regularly engaged in these areas of interest. These two songs do not invite active physical participation as much as the other four songs. Data show that the births of these songs aroused the interest and attention of the children who were most
involved in the topics. Children such as Ethan and Cory for example, whose interest in space was obvious in the transcribed group discussions presented in the previous section of this portrait, attended with obvious interest to the space song and participated enthusiastically in suggesting ideas and in dramatizing the space journey.

Similarly *The little pigs’ chorus* immediately attracted the interest of Gemma, Lola and Jessica, who were regularly improvised performances in their play and who very keen participants in many performances and video recordings of The three little pigs. The influence of this general interest in the topic of a song to the children’s ongoing engagement with the song is explored further in the next section of this portrait.

Table 5.4 below sets out the types of engagement behaviours shown by many children when the songs were first introduced to the Eager Beavers. Overwhelmingly it shows that the children were quick to respond physically and interactively to each song. Their responses were mostly modelled on the actions of the song leader, whether me or Dana. Vocal participation was mostly limited to sound effects and spoken lyric fragments at this stage of the life cycle of each song.

CM underpinned the children’s first responses to these new songs. The children’s participation showed synchronisation of pulse and in some instances of vocal quality. Their interaction with the song leader showed keenness to respond to questions in the songs and to create a shared
narrative by contributing ideas for lyrics where relevant. The children’s initial interest was sparked by imaginary dramatic enactment in some songs.

The table below presents the specific forms of participation for each of the six songs. In the next sections of this portrait, which explore the developing life of the six songs, development in these initial forms of engagement will be presented and analysed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Songs</th>
<th>Physical participation</th>
<th>Vocal participation</th>
<th>Interaction with song leader</th>
<th>Dramatic enactment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steam train</td>
<td>Arm movements like train wheels</td>
<td>Steam sounds</td>
<td>Imitation &amp; synchronisation of actions, sound effects, dialogue</td>
<td>Pretending to be a train or train driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drummer</td>
<td>Tapping beat on knees</td>
<td>Chanting of 1,2,3</td>
<td>Visual attention; synchronisation of pulse of actions; Synchronisation of dynamic level of voice and actions</td>
<td>Role play &amp; imaginary drumming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colours</td>
<td>Visual tracking to find stated colour</td>
<td></td>
<td>Calling out &amp; pointing to identify stated colour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinosaur</td>
<td>Tapping beat on knees for parts of song</td>
<td>“Stomp, stomp…” &amp; “Oh-oh!” (spoken)</td>
<td>Imitation &amp; synchronisation of beat actions, suggestions for lyrics – hiding places</td>
<td>Pretending to hide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Dramatic actions in bridge section</td>
<td>Countdown</td>
<td>Visual attention</td>
<td>Pretending to be an astronaut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little pigs</td>
<td>Dancing – beat moves suggested by some children</td>
<td>Some singing, mainly “hooray”</td>
<td>Imitation &amp; synchronisation of movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4 Initial engagement responses
Early development: Infancies

Little steam train

On the first field visit Dana led the children in singing this song at group time. The children joined in with great enthusiasm, making steam sounds, moving their arms like train wheels, and doing the responses in the B sections very loudly. Dana is an enthusiastic singer but does not sing with accurate pitch. Therefore she and the children were sing/speaking or speak/singing (Rutkowski, 1996). The melodic contour was fairly accurate, however they had made some changes to rhythm. The first phrase (“little steam train”) was different. In the original the word “steam” is a crotchet, however they were singing it as a minim. This didn’t have any effect on the rhythm of the rest of the phrase. It in fact sounded quite effective as it stressed the word “steam”, which served to stress a key word through giving it more rhythmic prominence, a strategy I used in several other of the six songs, such as If a dinosaur came to your house.

For the steam sounds which punctuated the beginnings and ends of each section, Dana and the children moved their arms and used their voices very fast, so that the “choo-choo-choo” sounds were semi-quavers, whereas on the recording staff were given, these were crotchets. Again, this didn’t matter. It was simply an example of the musical transformations that are often part of the oral transmission of songs between educators in early childhood. The loudness of the children’s participation in the B section was, as data over time showed, a common indicator of enthusiastic engagement.
with music of the children in the Eager Beavers group (see Chapter Four of this thesis).

On the third occasion of singing this song Martin said, “What about the big steam train?” I agreed that it was a good idea to sing about a big steam train, but we didn’t do it that day due to time constraints.

Journal 4 August, 2009

After we sang the steam train song through once, Martin said, “You didn’t sing about the big steam train”. So this time we did, changing the lyrics accordingly. When we finished Gemma then said, “What about a middle train?” So we sang the song again, changing the lyrics to “middle-sized steam train”.

This adaptation of the lyrics is an example of children being active agents in the creation of their own cultures through interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005). The children made changes and imaginative extensions to the song by applying their own knowledge, life experiences and interests. Martin had focused on the size of the train, and wished to vary this. Gemma, demonstrating shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007) then took up Martin’s idea and added to it.

There is significance in the fact that Martin and Gemma focused on size. Young children are frequently interested in size – in relation to things such as toys, their own height, and comparisons between theirs and others’
heights. This is consistent with Corsaro’s (2005) analysis of children’s peer cultures being concerned with power and control. Children often convey through conversation, play and drawings the concept of greater size equating with superior power or influence. This is reflected too in their strong interest in age, birthdays and getting older. The interest shown by children in the Eager Beavers group in sizes and numbers was evident in the life cycle of another of my new songs – Space is a really big place.

On the first occasion of singing about different sized trains, field notes show an intention to explore this further by making a book, to be illustrated by children, of the steam train song, with verses about different sized steam trains. Provision of this opportunity to reflect on the song might lead to the next stage of its life cycle. The achievement of this objective and its outcomes are discussed in the Childhood stage of the life cycle of this song.

**I’m a drummer in a band**

I heard the Eager Beavers sing this song, along with Little steam train, on my first day of field visits, as these were the two songs Dana had introduced to the children before fieldwork began. No instruments were used on this occasion; instead the children played imaginary drums on their legs. The children’s singing/chanting showed great enthusiasm and the lyrics and song structure were obviously familiar to them.

Not everyone sang but they all tapped their knees or thighs with great energy and synchronised their actions with their voices for “one, two,
three”. Some children synchronised the beat of their tapping with Dana and the children around them, but not all did this. Most children shouted the numbers loudly and excitedly. My first hearing of this song at Schubert Road was significant in showing the strong interest in loud music explored in Chapter Four, which became increasingly evident during fieldwork. Dana led the children in singing a loud verse, then a soft verse, then a loud verse of the song.

I first led the singing of *I’m a drummer in a band* during group time in week three of fieldwork. I played a djembe, a small African drum, while the children played imaginary drums on their knees. After being shown how to play the djembe, several children had individual turns. They were offered a choice between playing loudly or softly and all chose loudly. So that more children could participate in drumming, I encouraged pairs of children to play together. The children who drummed together made eye contact with each other and watched each other’s hands, intentionally seeking to synchronise the pulse of their playing. The evidence of CM was clear in the way the djembe was used with the song, especially when pairs of children shared the drumming.

The children seemed comfortably familiar with the song. Field notes showed that this sense of familiarity was also evident in their singing of *Little steam train* during the early weeks of field visits. These songs stand out from the other four of the six songs, especially in the light of the fact that they were first introduced by Dana, who had long term relationships
with the children. Initial interactions with these songs therefore involved experiences of interaction and CM with a familiar and trusted adult, Dana.

The birth and infancy stages of all six songs showed that the children’s responses were based on their desire to interact with the adult leading the singing. Observation notes and video data both revealed that in the early weeks of fieldwork more of the children attended closely and interactively during singing times with Dana. Hence early responses to the six songs were significantly influenced by the strength of the children’s relationships with a long term staff member as opposed to a new visitor.

Musical factors inherent in *I’m a drummer in a band* may also have played a part in the children’s early familiarity and confidence in engaging with this song. The song is very repetitive and hence quite simple in terms of its lyrics and structure, so it is an easy song for young children to learn. Field notes on first hearing the Eager Beavers sing *I’m a drummer in a band* reveal that although lyrics, rhythm and form were accurate, pitch and melody were not. The children were sing/speaking, with a sense of the song’s melodic contour rather than the exact melody and a stable sense of tonality. Audio recordings of this song made during several group sing-alongs indicate that the minor tonality was hard for the children to grasp. This may have been different if a strong vocal model (Bridges, 1994; Flowers & Dunne-Sousa, 1990) or a harmonic accompaniment such as guitar were provided.
Journal, 11 August, 2009

During winter, group singing time usually formed a transition from indoor to outdoor play. However on this day it was raining, so the children went from group time back to indoor play. We had just sung my drummer song, so I sat on the floor with my djembe to see if any children would like to continue the drumming experience. Rochelle, Tara and Tia stayed to have turns of the drum. I handed the djembe to Tara and moved slightly away from the little group, adopting the “least adult role” (Mandell, 1991) I generally used during free play times. I began to video their play.

The three girls sang together and took turns with the drum. Their spontaneous singing together incorporated improvisations based on I’m a drummer in a band, alternately playing and singing loudly and softly. First Tara and then Rochelle took a leading role, saying “I’m the teacher”. This playful creative use of the song seemed to signify that its life span had progressed beyond infancy, for these particular children at least; hence this episode is explored further in the next stage of the life cycle for this song.

Look around at the colours

The second occasion of singing Look around at the colours with the Eager Beavers was preceded by a request for “The rainbow song” (Sing a rainbow), just as the first occasion had been. Group sing-along on this day began with children requesting favourite songs. Their first choices were the standard favourites Twinkle twinkle little star and the ABC song, which
uses the same melody. After these two requests were sung Cory requested “the rainbow song” (Sing a rainbow). As before (see Birth section of this portrait), a few children joined in with parts of the song, especially the list of colours at the beginning. The singing of this song was followed by a notable conversation.

**Journal, 28 July, 2009**

“What about black?” Ethan called out. I replied that it wasn’t in rainbows, but a few children said they’d seen it. I suggested they look very carefully next time they saw a rainbow.

_Gemma had been listening to this conversation and asked “Is white in rainbows?”_

“Have you seen white?” I asked her.

“I don’t know,” Gemma replied.

This conversation is mentioned as it was one that recurred and developed over time, stimulated by the colours song. The children’s curiosity about the colours in the rainbow is an example of how a song can trigger imaginative thinking about life experiences. It also highlights how songs can be a medium for social communication and meaning-making. Gemma’s thinking was stimulated by Ethan’s request, and other children who listened to this conversation stored up Gemma’s and Ethan’s thoughts and revisited
them at a later time (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007). Vygotsky’s perspective of the socio-cultural nature of children’s learning is supported by these children’s way of responding to a song about rainbows (Vygotsky, 1978).

In order to acknowledge and seek to extend the children’s interest in rainbows and colours, next we sang Look around at the colours. Those who had heard it previously joined in with finding the stated colour. Their enthusiasm was obvious, shown by their attention to me, their smiles, and their very loud shouting out when they found it. Some found the stated colour on their own clothes or the clothes of their friends. Others found it on nearby furniture or in art works on the walls. Some children found large areas of very obvious colour, whereas others found tiny areas. Many children were keen to have a turn. Some children sang along, using very loud, shouting voices and chanting rather than singing.

There were two challenges with the children’s participation in this song. The first was to find a fair way to allow them to have turns. The second was to encourage singing rather than shouting. Field notes contain many descriptions of the children’s shouting out, not just during this song, but in much of the singing I observed, or participated in, in the Eager Beavers room. This is explored in Chapter Four and reference is made to Weddell (2005), who points out that this convention is often expected and encouraged in child audiences.
Shouting out by the children could be viewed as evidence of their interest in the song as a vehicle for social communication with me, and to a lesser extent with each other. Their shouting was accompanied by enthusiasm reflected in facial expressions and body language. I could see wide open eyes, smiles, hands waving energetically, bodies leaning forward. Some children’s eyes were on me, seeking eye contact, while others were looking at their friends sitting close by. The two Andrews, both aged three and a half and very close friends, for example, looked at each other, pointed to the same toy and called out excitedly together: “There’s red!”

Journal 4 August, 2009

At group time a week later Martin asked for the rainbow song again (‘Sing a rainbow’). *He reminded me about how I’d said that I didn’t think black was in rainbows, but he thought it was. Martin had obviously been following last week’s conversations with Ethan and Gemma, had been thinking about their ideas and had decided that he agreed with Ethan.* I suggested that he should look at the next rainbow he saw and let me know if he could see any black. “Ok,” he said, “but there will be black”.

After we sang ‘Sing a rainbow’ Gemma asked for “….the other rainbow song, where you look around for colours”. *I had been thinking about the shouting and the keen interest in having a turn to find a colour last time, and had decided on a different strategy for this song.* When I got to the question line of the song I tried the new
strategy, singing: “Gemma, can you find something yellow?” Gemma was one of several children who often looked around for a minute or so and mentally noted a few instances of the colour before deciding on one that was the least obvious. She seemed to want to challenge herself. So it took her about a minute to find an example of yellow that satisfied her. This was quite a long time for some children to wait, so there was some calling out. I explained that it was Gemma’s turn this time and asked them to listen for whose name I sang next time. I still tried to acknowledge other children’s discoveries of the colour after the named child had found the colour, so I did in fact let a few children call out. In that way I was respecting children’s engagement and their responses, but minimising the shouting out. For the final rendition of the song I sang “everyone” before the question, so they could all point (and shout).

Reflection in and on action (Schön, 1983) in relation to the children’s shouting out showed how experience as an early childhood educator often dominated my responses to and interpretations of singing interactions with the children of the Eager Beavers group. From the perspective of an educator, focus was on managing the group behaviour in a way that was appropriate for the institutional culture and staff/child relationships of the Schubert Road Child Care Centre. I was also concerned that the centre staff, knowing me to be an early childhood educator as well as a researcher, might judge me unfavourably if the children were deemed to be too
unsettled and noisy during group time. Therefore a strategy was needed to manage the group responses to this song in a way which minimised shouting out.

The perspective of a song writer and musician provides an alternate view. A different approach to this song to minimise calling out could still be beneficial, but not for the same reasons. Video and audio data and field notes on the children’s musical engagement with the song showed that shouting out and restlessness were distracting children’s focus from singing. As a song writer and musician I sought to devise strategies which would encourage more musical forms of engagement with the colours song.

The use of a different approach to this song would have implications in relation to each of my roles and identities. In terms of leading group singing, which blended the roles of educator and musician, the aim would be to facilitate more musical engagement and to be more inclusive of all, rather than allowing the noisiest and most excitable children to dominate. In terms of the role of researcher of the life cycle of this song, the use of a different approach would serve to allow for analysis of the children’s engagement with musical features of the song.

Having made the small change of adding one child’s name to the question at the end of Look around at the colours, it became possible to focus exploration on generating data related to children’s musical responses to this song. Data generated from group sing-alongs held after this change was
made revealed that my strumming on the guitar provided a strong sense of the beat to which many children responded. Some moved their heads in time with my strumming and others jigged (sitting) to the beat, giggling as they did so. CM was clearly evident in the way the children synchronised their movements with what they could see and hear in my singing and guitar playing.

Several children also turned their heads with the beat as they responded to the strumming. This seemed to be a dramatisation of looking around, as the lyrics specified. Gemma was the first one to do this, and several other children near her noticed and did it too. This could have been influenced by the fact that the musical culture of the Eager Beavers included many songs in which the lyrics denote or describe actions. Thus the children were accustomed to listening to lyrics for cues as to how to participate in the song. Gemma’s social leadership in this case led to a new response to this song, one which occurred many times from then on whenever we sang Look around at the colours (see photograph below). She was leading the other children in actively shaping the way that this song was being interpreted as it gradually became incorporated into the centre’s musical culture. This was evidence of not only CM but also of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005).
At this stage of the song’s life cycle very few children were singing along spontaneously, although whenever they were invited to join in quite a few children did. Many seemed to know the lyrics, rhythm and melodic contour. Gemma, Ethan, Cory, Molly, Jessica and Lola were the most regular and confident participants in singing this song. Field notes raised the question of whether the children’s focus was on waiting to hear whose turn it was and which colour they would find, rather than on singing. Video data indicated that this was likely. In a sense participation in this song required multi-tasking by the children – listening and waiting to hear what they might have to do as well as singing. It seemed that for these children the lyrics and their meaning were the dominant impression gained from the song, and hence the focus of their participation.
At a group time sing-along in late August Look around at the colours was the first song requested after the standard favourites. Gemma asked for: “The rainbow one, you know, that other rainbow one where you look around”. Again I did most of the singing. Once children were asked to sing a few did, but on the audio recording only three or four voices were audible. Those who did sing demonstrated quite accurate pitch, which seemed to validate the decision made to write the song with a narrow pitch range. As on previous occasions there was quite a lot of conversation each time the colour was stated. Observations showed that many children worked together with nearby friends to find the stated colour. There was some calling out, even though one child had been designated to find the colour, but not enough to provide any major distraction to the general group focus on the song.

Later that week during a group time sing-along some children requested Baa baa black sheep and several children called out colours, so we sang about pink, purple, blue and rainbow sheep. This was followed by a request from Alison for “the rainbow song”. “This one?” I asked her, and began Sing a rainbow. Alison nodded, so I continued. After that song was finished Gemma asked for “the other rainbow song” and someone else asked for “the song with finding colours”. Over the months of field visits Gemma was often the first to request this song. On one occasion towards the end of 2009, Gemma stated Look around at the colours was her favourite of all my songs.
As August progressed, some of the older children began joining in with the singing of the colours song very confidently straight away. The strategy of naming one child to find the stated colour was used at every sing-along and nearly everyone waited for the child named to point out the colour, showing that they were becoming accustomed to the inclusion of one child’s name in the lyrics of the song. Every effort was always made to select children who had their hand up for a turn, or those who were showing their interest through facial expressions and body language. I was keen, as I always am, to acknowledge children’s wish to participate. This way of communicating to the children that their presence and involvement is valued is an important part of contemporary approaches to early childhood curriculum and pedagogy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) and is evidence of the influence of the role of early childhood educator on my conduct of research.

As Look around at the colours became more familiar to the children, the behaviour noted around finding the stated colour continued to be evident. Many children looked first at their own clothes, then at the clothes of other children nearby, and only after that did they look around the room. Several of the older children enjoyed finding tiny areas of the specified colour rather than big obvious areas. A common theme identified in my previous research (Niland, 2005) was the children’s interest in linking a song to themselves and their lives (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Their search for colour on their own person was further evidence of this.
**Space is a really big place**

The second time I led the children in singing Space is a really big place, on the next visit after its birth, was at my instigation rather than at the request of one of the children. I generally avoided suggesting songs to the children, as I tried to adopt some aspects of the ‘least adult role’ (Mandell, 1991) even when leading group singing, by allowing the children to lead in choosing songs. However on this occasion I wished to increase the children’s familiarity with this new song, especially to see if it would engage them more than the previous space song had.

Quite a few of the oldest children seemed to remember the song and joined in singing from the beginning. Gemma in particular sang it beautifully, with accurate pitch, her body swaying with the beat. The line “space is a really big place” was easy for many children to remember, so their singing was most confident in this part of the song. The children’s singing on that occasion was quite chant-like, showing they had grasped the lyrics and rhythm, but not yet the melody. Given that Space is a really big place was the fifth of the six songs to be introduced to the children of the Eager Beavers group, this style of singing was indicative of a pattern in the early stages of the life cycles of the songs.

**Journal, 13 August, 2009**

The dramatisation section of the space song was enacted very enthusiastically by most of the group, and everyone joined in to count down and blast off with lots of shouting and energetic
jumping. Ethan and Cory zoomed around the edge of the group, shouting “Zoom!” in their loudest voices. A small group of younger boys followed them. It took a bit of dramatic role play on my part to get everyone to ‘come down to land’. ‘I wonder which planet this is,’ I asked them, so that the boys sat down again. “Jupiter,” yelled Ethan.

**Journal, 18 August, 2009**

On my arrival the following week, the children were all seated around Dana for a group time. Ethan was standing next to her, holding the karaoke microphone which lives in the Eager Beavers room. “Ethan has made up a space song,” Dana told me, and taking the microphone she announced “Here is Ethan, singing his space song!” in a dramatic voice. All the children clapped and some staff members cheered, as did Cory. The audio recorder caught the song, although the recording wasn’t very clear, due to background noise and the distance between the recorder and Ethan. However some of his lyrics were as follows:

“There was an astronaut.

He went to heaps of planets.

He didn’t just go to planets; he went to the sun and the moon.

He went up and down, up and down.

And that rocket ship went to Jupiter.

…..stars like diamonds in the sky….”
Ethan was chanting rather than singing, but there was a sense of beat and 4/4 metre in most of his rendition. I was interested to hear the line about stars like diamonds in the sky, an example of Ethan using snippets and ideas from a known song in creating his spontaneous song (Barrett, 2006).

Ethan looked at me and smiled shyly as he sang, seemingly focused on sharing his song with me. This may have been related to the fact that I was recording him, but I think it also related to his view of me as a singing person. He had already grasped that I had written some of the songs I shared with the children, and knew which ones were my songs. Dana told me later that this was the first time Ethan had made up a song and come to tell her about it. When the children moved away from group time to play, I played the recording of his space song back to Ethan. He smiled broadly on hearing his voice. *He also commented that he couldn’t hear it very well.*

Dana asked if anyone else wanted to sing a space song. Molly sang *a snippet, very quietly:* “The space ship went up very high”.

Madeleine also had a *turn:* “There was petrol in the rocket”.

As I led a group sing-along before lunch on the same day, after the usual song requests I asked the children if they’d like to sing the space song. “Yes” said Gemma emphatically. Cory and Ethan stopped wrestling on the
sidelines when they heard the word space and sat up facing me. I began to
strum my guitar and sing the song. Gemma joined in really strongly. She
remembered the song very well. Two verses were sung (“millions of
stars….”, “planets and moons….”) and the children had more suggestions
about what else might be in space. “The sun” called Madeleine, “it’s really
hot”. So a third verse was created (“there’s a very hot sun, in space…”).
This was followed by the dramatisation section. The countdown was loud,
as previously, and several children such as Katey, Molly and Lana, stood up
and pretended to float in space.

**If a dinosaur came to your house**

It was not until October, after several weeks break in field visits and after
the space play interest had died down, that this song was sung with the
children for the second time. During this period visiting pre-service
teaching students had been working with some children who showed an
interest in dinosaurs, and dinosaurs featured quite often in the dramatic play
of many of the older boys in the Eager Beavers group. One day in late
October Cory, Ethan, Martin and Jason were digging for dinosaurs in the
sand pit. They discussed which ones they were looking for, and tried to
outdo each other in comparing the sizes of their imagined dinosaurs. This
was yet another example of the interest in power and control mentioned by
Corsaro (2005) which is so often evident in children’s social play.
Journal, 13 October, 2009

Because of this dinosaur play I launched into ‘If a dinosaur came to your house’ at group time before lunch that day. “Let’s hear some dinosaur footsteps,” I said to the children and began to pat my knees alternately while singing “Stomp, stomp.....” slowly, strongly and dramatically. The whole group joined in enthusiastically, Cory and Ethan possibly a little too enthusiastically. Well, a little too loudly anyway. I noticed that all the children were synchronising the pulse of their knee tapping with my singing and my actions. The fact that this was a slow beat didn’t seem to matter.

The older boys were dominant in calling out places to hide. Someone suggested hiding in the garage, possibly remembering Brian’s suggestion from many weeks ago. Other suggestions on that day included hiding under the bed, behind the door and under the table.

I whispered the lines “Be very quiet.... Be very still..... and listen.....” using dramatic facial expressions and long pauses. This really captured the children’s attention. Many of them vied after the final pause to be the first to say “oh-oh!” This was shouted a bit louder each verse. The feelings of excitement and anticipation were palpable. I was aware of wide eyes on me, as the children engaged with the narrative of the song.
The little pigs’ chorus

Once The little pigs’ chorus was composed and introduced to the children it was sung on every visit until after the graduation celebrations were complete. During group singing the week after the song was first introduced, Lola requested “the pig song”. As with all the six songs, many of the children were sing/speaking, so that lyrics and rhythm were accurate while pitch was not. However most of the children, including the entire graduating group, approached the song with familiarity and enthusiasm.

“Wow, you’ve really learnt the song quickly,” I commented to the children.

“We heard your CD,” Jessica told me.

The evidence of familiarity and confidence with this song so early in its life cycle was similar to the early stages of the lives of Little steam train and I’m a drummer in a band, the two songs first introduced to the Eager Beavers by Dana. Although Dana had not introduced The little pigs’ chorus to the children, she did use the CD to sing it with them almost daily. Therefore, as with the train and drummer songs, the children’s early experiences with this song took place in the context of their relationships with Dana.

Because most of the children were so confident with The little pigs’ chorus, I decided to suggest the use a performer/ audience scenario during group sing-along, so that the song could be repeated several times, to build the
children’s familiarity and hopefully their interest even further. This approach reflected both a music educator’s and a researcher’s perspective, as hearing the children sing in small groups would allow for individual assessment of singing as well as generation of data on the progress of the life cycle of the song.

Many children were keen to come out the front and lead the singing. Several groups of three or four children had a turn, so that everyone who volunteered was accommodated. A group of the oldest children - Gemma, Lola, Jessica, Ethan, Cory, Brian - were keen participants and sang the song quite well. They knew the lyrics and synchronised pulse and rhythm with each other accurately (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). I sang along softly and some groups sang the melody accurately, matching my pitch.

More than half of the children wanted a turn to stand out the front and sing. Those who were seated spontaneously applauded each performance, a common response during many group times in the Eager Beavers room, especially at this time when a public performance was being prepared. Jessica, Gemma and Lola were by far the most confident singers. They were also the most confident performers of the play, and volunteered often to be actors. These three girls featured in many of the video versions, either as actors or as audience members sitting close to the actors and joining in with narration, dialogue and singing. They also regularly took turns to announce the performers.
Journal, 29 October, 2009

Later that day, out on the verandah, I noticed Tara walking along singing “Hooray, hooray, we’re glad to say...” as she looked around to choose who or what she wanted to play. At lunch Lola began to sing the song. When she got to the line about the wolf she turned to me: “How does it go?” I sang that section of the song for her. Then she asked me “Where did you learn that song?”

“From here” I said, pointing to my head, “I made it up.” She just looked at me and didn’t respond.

Growing up: Childhoods

The progression of the life cycle of each song from infancy to childhood was not signified by any specific forms of engagement common to all six songs. Just as a parent can rarely define a particular day on which a child ceases to be an infant and becomes a child, so the development of the lives of songs is gradual, individual and affected by context and culture. In general progression to the childhood stage of each of the six songs was indicated by a level of familiarity and playful engagement with each song. There was no common time frame for development, as some songs were sung much more often than others.

Little steam train

During October, the fourth month of fieldwork, Little steam train was requested on two consecutive field visits by Martin’s best friend Jason. He
asked for “the train song”, saying “sing about a big train.” As we sang
many children participated in making the movements and sounds of steam,
however only a small number sang the verses of the song. The singers were
mainly from the older group - Gemma, Jessica, Ethan, Lola and Cory. Most
children joined in the call/response section, and everyone finished off the
song with very fast, loud and energetic steam sounds. Ethan then requested
we sing about a giant steam train, which we did. A few more children sang
the verse this time, but many of the boys focused solely on the train sounds
and movements. For the ‘giant train’ most children interpreted the song
with louder dynamics than the previous rendition.

Journal, 27 October, 2009

The next time this song was requested, two weeks later, it was again
Jason who made the request. He asked for a big train to be first. I
then sang about a little train, and Cory asked for a “giant” train. It
seemed that the boys who showed the most enthusiastic
participation during this song had decided that singing about trains
of different sizes was now an integral part of the song. In between
renditions of this song Jason called out “How do you know this
song, Amanda?”

“She made it up,” Gemma answered him.

During this period of fieldwork, song sheets that included space for the
children to draw pictures about the songs were made available to the
children, including one for Little steam train. It had two small train clip art pictures at the top of the page, one train bigger than the other, to help children identify the song.

Several of the boys who enjoyed joining in with the train song came to the drawing table on the first occasion that song sheets were set out. However after they looked at the song sheets available they either chose the dinosaur or space song sheets to draw on, and not the train song sheet. Only Tara chose to draw a train. This could of course be due to the children’s interest in drawing particular things, or their perceptions about their ability to draw trains to their satisfaction. It could also be that drawing pictures of dinosaurs, planets, stars or space ships appealed more to their imaginations. At the time I didn’t ask the children why they chose particular song sheets. Observing their concentration on drawing, I was unwilling to disturb this by asking questions at that moment. On later reflection, I wish I had done this perhaps as they moved away from the table.

In November 2009, the fifth month of field visits, when a lot of the curriculum and the day’s experiences were focused on the upcoming graduation celebrations, staff members were taking photos and video recordings many times during the day and placing these on DVDs which would be given to families at the end of the year. Often at rest time the latest DVD clips or photo montages were shown to the children on a TV, and the children watched these with great enthusiasm and much laughter.
Observation of this interest led to a decision to make and show recordings of the children singing, as mentioned in Chapter Four. Discussion with Dana ensued, to establish the approach to making video recordings. It was important for the children to feel relaxed and participation to be voluntary. The recordings would be valuable for me for continued analysis and interpretation of data after fieldwork was completed, but could also potentially be a tool for stimulating reflective conversations with the children as part of data generation and interpretation (Clark & Moss, 2005). Dana agreed to talk to some of the older children and gather their ideas on how they would like to stage the recording sessions.

Dana and the children decided they wanted to do solo singing performances, with microphone, stage and a curtain. It is important to note that these video recordings were taken during preparations for the graduation celebrations and the play The three little pigs, so that performing and viewing performances was a big part of life in the Eager Beavers room. It seemed that many of the children were interested in doing singing performances in a similar way.

It was hoped that some children would choose one of the six songs for their performances, although a decision was made not to limit or influence their preferences. In fact when the recordings were done most children chose traditional favourites. Only Bonnie (one of the quietest children in the older group) decided to sing “little engine” (her words). None other of the six songs were chosen.
The video of Little steam train shows that Bonnie couldn’t remember the song very well. Most of the singing was done by Jessica, Gemma and Lola, who could be seen at the side of the stage/table, singing the song with confidence, accuracy and great gusto. They also feature prominently in the portrait of *The little pigs’ chorus* later in this chapter. The girls’ singing was very much chanting or sing/speaking. They performed the actions and steam sounds with considerable speed and loudness, as did many members of the audience.

Not only was the graduation focusing the children’s interest, but Christmas songs also became increasingly popular as the end of the year approached. Therefore it was not until two weeks after the recording of Bonnie that Little steam train was requested again. Cory asked for it, and guided the singing of a series of verses, beginning with “little” and growing progressively larger (and louder!). “Medium” was followed by “big”, then “giant”, then “huge”. On this occasion only the usual few older children sang continuously, but almost the whole group joined in with the call/response section and with the steam sounds and movements. Some children made steam sounds and wheel movements for the whole song, except for the call/response section.

The song Little steam train had in a sense served to introduce me to the community of the Eager Beavers. Given that it was the song most enthusiastically chosen by Dana at our initial meeting, it is likely that her strong interest, combined with the fascination with trains of many of the
children, made this song a popular choice in my early visits. However in
spite of the fact that this song had the longest life cycle, the frequency of it
being chosen diminished over the eight months of fieldwork. Factors in the
cultural life of the Eager Beavers community (graduation) and of the wider
community (Christmas) may have served to focus the children’s interests
and song choices elsewhere. However factors in the song itself may also
play a part in this, when compared with other songs. This will be explored
further in Chapter Six.

*I'm a drummer in a band*

This song progressed from infancy to childhood during the third week of
fieldwork, as shown in the observations of the spontaneous play of a small
group of girls with my djembe, an episode referred to earlier in the infancy
stage of the six songs. This episode, which was captured on video, was a
clear example of learning happening through play, relationships, and
revisiting experience. It can be viewed from the perspective of CHAT,
Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Stesenko, 2008) which derives from
the socio-cultural view of development put forward by Vygotsky (1978).
The video supports the CHAT theory that relationships and interaction are
at the heart of children’s learning.

Tara led most of the interaction, playing the role of a teacher. Rochelle
hovered impatiently, wanting control of the drum. When Tara finally
relinquished it and moved away, Rochelle sat on the adult chair nearby and
proceeded to play the role of teacher, communicating at times with an imaginary child and at other times with Gemma and Phil.

Rochelle and Tara both used snippets of *I'm a drummer in a band* and their singing showed that they knew the song quite well. All the children in this video kept the beat accurately when singing/chanting and synchronised the pulse of their singing and tapping with each other.

![Image of children playing with musical instruments](image)

**Figure 5.22** Photograph: Lola and Madeleine synchronise pulse in the drummer song

The week after that play episode took place, in late August, we sang *I'm a drummer in a band* again during group time. The djembe was used and passed around for pairs of children to take turns in playing. The children really shouted for the loud section. They sang and tapped carefully in the
quiet verse, so I ended on that. (My identity as a music educator is evident in this decision, as I wanted to conclude the singing of that song with a rendition which showed the children listening carefully to their music-making). The children synchronised the pulse of their singing and of their taps to “one, two, three” with each other (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) (see Figure 5.22 above).

Pairs and small groups of particular friends watched each other very carefully and made eye contact during the song. When this happened a leader and followers relationship would emerge for the rest of the song. It was not always possible to identify which child was taking which role, and it often seemed that the roles changed from time to time through some unspoken instantaneous communication. Observations of this phenomenon led to postulating that these interactions were examples of the creation of shared narratives, an element of CM.

On this day, as on previous occasions, the loud verses were extremely loud. From the perspective of a music educator, the harsh shouting which many children did led me instinctively to seek to curb and reshape their responses. However from the perspective of a researcher the loudness had cultural significance, as it had been shown by data generated over time to be a key element of the musical culture of the Eager Beavers group. Field notes from this sing-along record observations of the smiles and boisterous energy which accompanied the shouted singing and loud tapping.
I used my role as leader of the singing to begin a quiet verse. Most of the children imitated the whispering and gentle tapping. They hunched forward and unconsciously slowed down their movements and singing slightly. They seemed to enjoy the contrast in dynamics.

*I’m a drummer in a band* was not sung again for approximately two months. As fieldwork progressed, the children took the lead in suggesting songs most of the time, and this one was not requested. However several times on the verandah during outdoor play time, children who came to join me played the djembe and sang that song. On some occasions I began the song and they joined in, while on others children initiated the song.

During interactions in which I began to sing while a child was playing the djembe, I noticed that some children were not listening to my singing or attempting to synchronise their drumming with it. I did not stop singing, however, unless a child seemed to show by their expression or comments that they did not want me to sing. Tyler, a shy child with a mild hearing impairment and speech delay was someone who did not synchronise his drumming with my singing at all. However he did watch my face intently and seemed to be listening to the singing, because at the end of the song he stopped tapping exactly in time with my singing of “stop!” and seemed to be waiting for this word. Although he was not able to drum with the pulse of my singing, possibly because of his hearing difficulties, he obviously had an understanding of the structure of the song.
Megan was another child whose drumming didn’t synchronise with my singing of *I’m a drummer in a band*. She let me sing about half the song then said “Don’t sing, I’ll just tap.” Here was an instance of music-making which stood out as Megan was choosing not to play along with my singing, but preferred to play alone. Possibly she was interested in exploring the sound of the drum in a different way to what was required in the drummer song. She continued to tap quite fast, playing a long series of beat without stopping. She occasionally increased the dynamics to very loud then softened them slightly. Her tempo was fairly constant. Megan’s request that I stop singing could still indicate her awareness of CM in that she may have sensed that she wanted to play the drum with rhythm and tempo which did not fit with those required to synchronise with my singing. In other words to choose not to enter into communicative music-making with another person she would first have needed to be aware that such a situation demanded working together.

**Journal, 17 November, 2009**

One afternoon during November when the children were drawing on the song sheets created for each of the six songs, Tara chose to do a drawing for the drummer song. Tara was one of the children videoed in the early weeks of fieldwork singing this song with several friends during free play time. She drew drums and drum sticks. “Who’s playing them?” I asked.
“Me,” she said, and then drew herself. I commented on the hair she’d drawn, as it was the same as the style she was wearing that day (2 pigtails). She looked at the drawing again and said “Needs arms”.

“Good idea for playing the drums,” I agreed. I started to sing the song, and she joined in, but stopped halfway through, as she was concentrating on her drawing.

This occasion is the last journal entry for this song. In keeping with an ethnographic researcher role - requiring the researcher to fit in with the prevailing events and interests of the community at the research site - I didn’t try to influence the children’s song requests, which related mostly to the upcoming events of graduation and Christmas. No-one chose this song when asked to make choices, so we didn’t sing it again during group times.

When field visits recommenced in 2010 after the Christmas holidays, again no-one requested this song. In hindsight I regret not suggesting it, so that its life cycle could have been traced over the full period of field visits.

There were many photographs of children playing the djembe which were taken (by me and by children) on the verandah during free play times. Towards the end of field visits, after the graduating group had left Schubert Road Children’s Centre, an idea for a book of the drummer song was finally conceived and created. It consisted of one line of the song and one photo.
on each page, printed single-sided, so that a reader/singer would need to turn the page at the end of each line of the song. Some photos from group sing-alongs of this song were used, as well as photos of individual children playing the djembe. Most of the photos were of children in the graduating group, as they had shown more interest in seeking out my company and playing the djembe than many of the younger Eager Beavers.

This book was shared with Molly, Danni and Felix during one of the last field visits. There was a photo of Felix in it, which made him smile broadly.

![Figure 5.23 Photograph of Felix in book of I’m a drummer in a band](image)
whom he had especially looked up to in the previous year. However this book didn’t inspire the children to sing, as the book of Look around at the colours did (see below). These books were left in the reading area of the Eager Beavers room. No data was obtained from staff about interest the children showed in the song books after field visits ceased.

It is interesting that the life cycle of *I’m a drummer in a band* was shorter than that of most others of the six songs, especially because it was one of two learned by Dana and introduced to the children before fieldwork commenced. It is possible that this relates to the composition of the song, which was originally created to fulfil a music education objective. Although lyrics were written that encouraged children to play a dramatic role, the links to everyday life and the potential for imagining a narrative around the song are more limited than for any other of the six songs shared with the children of the Eager Beavers group.

Although this song has some potential for social interaction and CM, its potential for extensions and adaptations is restricted mostly to exploration of musical concepts. Perhaps for children to develop their responses to this song, more intentional teaching (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) would be needed. In Chapter Six this issue is discussed further.

*Look around at the colours*

During the first field visit in October, after a break of several weeks, group sing-along began with a request for “the rainbow song where you look
around”. Unfortunately no note was taken of who made the request but it may have been Gemma. The timing of this request, ahead of the usual traditional favourites, signalled that the song could be considered to have progressed from infancy to childhood. On this day we sang it many times, going through about eight colours. Over half of the children joined in singing, and although a child was named in the final question each time, most of the children were so enthusiastic about revisiting this song after a break that there was considerable shouting out. This may have arisen from the children’s interest in interacting with me, as they hadn’t seen me for a while. If so, this provides further evidence of the way singing for the children is an act of social communication and shared meaning-making and is influenced by relationships with the singing leader, as mentioned in relation to the life cycles of Little steam train, *I’m a drummer in a band* and *The little pigs’ chorus*, earlier in this portrait.

**Journal, 27 October, 2009**

During outdoor play time, I sat outside with my djembe and waited for children to come and play it, using the reactive interaction strategy of the least adult role. Gemma came over and began to tap a beat. She sang some traditional songs (such as *Twinkle twinkle little star*) while tapping the beat on the djembe. She paused and asked “What next?” I suggested ‘Look around at the colours’ and she began to sing. She included her name in the question and chose a colour for herself to find. Alison had sat down with us by then, so she sang along quietly as well. Alison seemed comfortably familiar
with the colours song, as did Gemma. The two girls had just settled in to singing the song together and asking each other to point out colours, when Gemma’s close friend Lola came over, walking like a penguin. “Let’s walk like penguins,” she said, so off they all went.

During a group sing-along that same week Tara requested Baa baa black sheep, but as soon as the song began she said, “No, the rainbow song”. “Do you mean this one?” I asked and sang the opening phrase of Look around at the colours. Tara nodded. Again my “rainbow song” had been requested ahead of Sing a rainbow, further evidence of progression through its life cycle.

Look around at the colours was sung about six times on this occasion. Although only a few children actually participated in singing along, many looked for colours. I asked Ethan to find something white, but he asked to find black. I waited a moment and then he decided to find white. Reflection on Ethan’s response led to a concern that the way the song structures the children’s interactions is perhaps too limiting. A future challenge would be to extend the song so that it gives the children more power in the interactive relationship with an adult song leader. Field notes made that week recorded this concern and included a statement of intention to create a new verse or chorus which would allow a child to choose which colour they or a friend would find. Ethan’s request for black was also the subject of journal reflection, in view of the conversation of several months ago about the presence or absence of black in rainbows.
The high levels of interest and participation shown by most of the children in Look around at the colours provided further indication that the song had progressed beyond infancy. The children showed an enthusiasm that seemed very much related to familiarity with the song (Siebenaler, 1999). As well as this, most children, whether singing or not, were generally observed to be moving gently with the beat of the song. The synchronisation with my guitar strumming and with each other was an example of CM.

**Journal, 12 November, 2009 (a)**

During group time sing-along Phil called out “Sing the rainbow song”. I had just agreed to a request to sing ‘Little steam train’, so I told him his choice would be next. For the next few minutes he sat with his head down and refused to join in. This was not typical of his responses during sing-alongs. Phil usually sits near the front and participates with enthusiasm. He often raises his hand to contribute ideas. Taken out of the wider context of the relationships at the centre, his response could be construed as being an indicator of his preference for one song over the other. However because I had spent so much time interacting with the children over many months, I knew that in fact Phil is very keen on the train song. So I understood that his sadness was related to the fact that he had wanted to make the first song request, but had been beaten to it by Cory. I think Phil had also noticed how often the older boys he admired were successful in making singing requests, and he felt
upset that his attempt to make a request was not immediately successful.

I was reminded by this episode of Corsaro’s (2005) analysis of children’s peer interactions as often being concerned with power and control. Phil had observed others gaining this during our sing-alongs and was attempting to exert similar power. I felt sorry to have to thwart this attempt, so I made sure that we moved fairly quickly from the train song to Look around at the colours. This situation is an example of how contexts, often much broader than the present time, are important to consider in order to fully understand children’s responses. It also highlights the value of ethnographic research, which allowed the researcher to become familiar with the peer social networks which were so important to the children of the Eager Beavers group. Extended time spent with them enabled me to explore the influence of peer relationships on the children’s responses to songs.

**Journal, 12 November, 2009 (b)**

*When we did sing ‘Look around at the colours’ a short time later, I gave Phil the first turn to find a colour. It was illuminating to see how he stretched the wonderful moment of being in control, looking in every possible direction around the room before deciding on which area of “brown” to point out. We sang the song about ten times on that day to give lots of children turns to find the stated colour. There was confident singing from most of the group. As we sang I kept remembering my reflections on the previous occasion*
where we’d sung this song, and felt even more strongly that I would like to extend it so that the children could choose which colour to find. When we stopped the song because it was time for lunch several children said “Oh, let’s sing it some more”.

Field notes on the colours song from October to December, 2009 show greatly increased engagement with this song, and significant evidence of the use of a focus on interaction. The extract below is a typical example.

**Journal, 19 November, 2009**

*At Heidi’s request, we sang ‘Look around at the colours’. Most children joined in, either singing or chanting the words. I noticed that nearly everyone was focusing on me and participating in the song with looks of enthusiasm on their faces. Given that I had now been a regular visitor at the centre for five months I wondered how much the depth of children’s engagement related to their familiarity with the song and how much it related to their familiarity and relationships with me. Many children put up their hands waiting for turns. There was lots of good singing- confident and fairly tuneful.*

* A casual staff member, Hannah, was with us today. I had met her in the Eager Beavers room about three months previously. On that day she had commented on how much she liked ‘Look around at the colours’, although I remember that the children had been quite restless and unfocused during the song. Hannah had asked me to
write it down for her so she could learn it. Today she commented on how well the children seemed to know the song, and how much they seemed to enjoy it. “There’s a really different feel to their attention now” were her words.

The children’s enthusiastic participation lasted for about ten renditions today, before some began wriggling and chatting. Noticing the restlessness I took a breath and opened my mouth to start a different song. But Gemma began to sing ‘Look around at the colours’, with great energy and lovely tuneful singing. Because I always like to show by my responses that I have noticed children’s engagement, I joined in and for the last phrase I sang “Gemma can you find something purple?”, choosing a colour I knew was one of her favourites. During lunch I heard Hannah singing the song to herself as she helped serve food. Lola, who was nearby, joined in for a few bars.

After lunch that day, when we sat down to sing some more, Lola and Gemma started to sing the colours song together, facing each other. Their CM was very evident. They maintained eye contact and sang in time and in pitch with each other. Gemma took the lead and chose a colour for Lola.

Observation of Gemma and Lola showed strong intention to sing together, as well as musical synchronisation with each other (Malloch & Trevarthen,
2009). It seemed that these two children had really developed a strong relationship with this song. Their interaction also provided further rationale for extending or modifying the song to allow children more agency. Reflection on this data after the completion of fieldwork shows a lost opportunity to converse with Gemma and Lola and request their participation in extending the song. This was one of many examples of further data generation possibilities to strengthen the agency of the children in the research which were not utilised.

In the last few months of field visits, in 2010, Gemma, Lola, Ethan and many of the children who had shown the most engagement with this song, had left Schubert Road Child Care Centre. The children’s song requests differed from those of the previous year and Look around at the colours was not requested. Although I intended to initiate the song myself, the children had so many other requests that an opportunity did not arise. Field data on this song was revisited early in 2010 with the aim of perhaps developing some different data generation strategies. The intention to create a book of Look around at the colours was considered.

Journal notes from 2009 document an intention to make a book which would invite the children to interact with this song in a different way (Clark & Moss, 2005). However I had not been able to decide on a suitable visual concept or format. Finally, in the last month of fieldwork an idea emerged which I thought might be effective, so a book was produced.
The plan was to use the children’s drawings or photos to illustrate, but I had not been able to gather drawings or photos which would invite rich interactions around colours until now. I shared this book with the current Eager Beavers. Some of them, such as Molly, Phil, Martin and Felix, had been Eager Beavers the previous year but were now the oldest in the group, while others were new or had moved up from the younger Rainbow group.

The book produced was A4, spiral bound, with a clear plastic cover. Illustrations found on the internet were used. Each picture contained repeated items in a range of bright colours – balloons, rainbows, butterflies, cars, flowers. Some were clip art pictures and others stock (copyright free) photo illustrations. They provided the children with potential to identify specific colours within each individual picture, just as we do in the surrounding environment when we sing the song together. Each page contained the text of the song, with a different colour stated in the question at the end. That colour word had a background of its colour. Underneath this there is an illustration. A sample page of this book is shown in Figure 5.10 below.
I brought the book to the centre and sat with it on the verandah during outdoor play time. Felix, Molly and Danni came over to say hello. These three children are all very keen singers who have shown an interest in my songs and in spending time with me. Danni was in the Rainbow room last year, when fieldwork began, so hadn’t been involved in group singing very often until now.

Journal, 16 March, 2010

Molly asked about the book I was holding. “Would you like to hear it?” I asked. All three children said they would, and moved
themselves in that way I’ve so often seen when it’s story time: wriggling to a position where they can see, sitting up a little bit straighter, with an expectant look in their eyes. I began to sing the song. Felix and Molly joined in straight away. Felix had his wonderful broad grin, the one I’ve seen so often when he sings, especially with others. Danni hadn’t heard the song as often, so she listened at first. We sang the whole book, and each child had a turn to find a colour.

Molly asked to have the book when we’d finished. She began to sing from the beginning. She held the book toward us at the end of each page, so that we could point out the colour she had sung in the question line. She sang a shortened version of the song, omitting the repetition of “Look around at the colours” which is the second phrase of the song. She sang the song several times for each page, inviting us to find several different colours in each illustration.

Molly was leading our little group, in a ‘teacher’ role, a play role she often adopts. She is a strong and fairly tuneful singer, and enjoys directing other children. She decided each time who would point out the colour, and resisted Danni’s requests to hold the book. When Molly asked Felix to point out purple in an illustration he did, but then pointed to his own shirt, which was also purple.

Molly’s responses showed interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005) occurring as she worked out how she wanted to relate to the group as a
leader, and how she wanted to sing the song and use it to interact with Felix, Danni and me. Her easy singing and interacting with the colours song indicated Molly using a process of interpretive reproduction in moving the song into the centre’s musical culture. Felix’s confident and enthusiastic singing of this song also showed that for him this song is a part of his stored knowledge of ‘the songs we sing in the Eager Beavers’.

In general, many of the decisions involved in writing Look around at the colours were made because of the findings of my previous research (Niland, 2005), in which I found that children were most actively engaged with songs that allowed them to make individual choices or decisions and songs which related to their play interests. Now that the colours song has been shared with many groups of children, while links with play interests remain of some importance, it is also evident to me now that underlying the children’s engagement with this active participation is their innate CM. They love the opportunity to interact with a lead singer in responding to a question. By choosing a colour the children and I are creating a shared narrative around colours. When children led the singing of the song with their peers, as Gemma and Lola did on one occasion, and as Molly did using the book, they were creating shared narratives with their peers.

The children’s engagement through the question line of the song also points to Corsaro’s identification of themes of autonomy, control and power in children’s peer interactions (2005). The question in this song provides the children with an opportunity to take control over the direction of the
narrative which the song creates. Therefore it is very satisfying for them. Perhaps too this song is engaging because children are naturally visually observant and at this stage of their lives are building up their understanding of colours - names, shades, tints, gradients, similarities, differences. Therefore the song provides an opportunity to visually explore their surroundings and develop their knowledge of them. Many children who sing this song search first for the specified colour on their own person. It may be that for them the song acknowledges part of their identity and their place in the social group of the child care centre when they can point out the colour on their clothes or shoes.

In creating the portrait of the life cycle of Look around at the colours, written data, audio recordings and videos were reviewed and coded around themes of CM, social interaction and interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005). I also listened to the children’s singing and noted their reproduction of pitch and rhythm. The writing of the portrait led to further reflection about this song and the children’s participation. These provide new perspectives on the song, so that the act of writing moved my interpretation and analysis of data to a deeper level. As Richardson (2003) and others have pointed out, writing can be in itself an act of research.

Ever since I began sharing this song with groups of children older than the toddlers for whom it was originally created, I have felt a sense of dissatisfaction with it. I have tried many times to work on it, so that it extends the potential for the children to interact creatively. However not
until May, 2010, shortly after the end of fieldwork, was a satisfactory idea for extension developed.

**Journal, 4 May, 2010**

After several hours spent working on this portrait I went for a walk in the early evening, to reflect on what I had written. I sang the song quietly as I walked and surprised myself by finally creating with a way to continue the song so that it invites further individual interaction. The thought that triggered this for me was the realisation, as I reflected on data and wrote about it, that the song was lacking a musical way for the children to participate individually. I also realised as I sang the song that a blues melodic variation on the main melodic phrase would work as an extension. So I created a bridge in which an open ended question is sung: “Can you sing about the colours that you see around?” This question invites a musical response from one child, which could be followed by a group response such as: “Hooray for ... (colour)!”. which is spoken. This format of sung question/ individual sung response/ group spoken response is repeated three times, followed by a final line which is sung by everyone.

I was very excited about my creative epiphany, as it was a personal experience of the value of practice-led research (Barrett, 2007a). The process of researching children’s engagement with this song
led me to solve a creative problem and hopefully to enhance the potential for CM inherent in my song.

Work on the revised version of Look around at the colours progressed over several weeks. I began to have doubts about altering the original version of the song for children who were already familiar with it. Eventually an alternative adaptation was decided upon: to shorten the song in a way that would still provide a creative opportunity for children older than toddlers, such as the children of the Eager Beavers group.

A shorter version of the song was created by replacing the last line, which is a repeat of the opening two lines, with a question. The lyrics of the song would then be as follows:

“Look around at the colours, look, look around;
Look around at the colours, look, look around;
There are so many colours that can be found;
Can you sing about the colours that you see around?”

The children could then sing their own sentence about a colour they can see, using an improvised tune based on the melody of the question. I would model this for the children when introducing this version of the song, and then leave it to them to create an answer in their own way. An example of an answer might be: “There is red on my shirt”, or “There is blue on the door”. Ultimately this version of the colours song wasn’t actually sung with the children of the Eager Beavers group, however the creation of an
alternate version means that there are now increased possibilities for interaction with the song when it is sung with other children in the future.

It is significant that Look around at the colours moved through a life cycle from Conception to Childhood within the musical culture of one early childhood setting, but was still not fully finished. Molly’s variation on its form and my adaption of lyrics indicated the dynamic nature of the life cycles of many children’s songs within early childhood musical cultures. This process of continual development supports the roles of CM and interpretive reproduction in children’s singing. It indicates too that children are active agents in the creation of their musical cultures (Campbell, 1998) and that those cultures are dynamic and subject to influences and intersections with other cultures in young children’s lives (Slobin, 1993). The continuation of the song writing process in its post birth stages provides a valuable example of the role of reflection in my multiple roles during the research. The reflection which led to revision of Look around at the colours involved simultaneously the adoption of song writing and early childhood educator perspectives.

**Space is a really big place**

During September, 2009 I had several weeks away from Schubert Road due to illness in my family. In the weeks missed, the children’s interest in space was further explored through play and extended by the staff. This culminated in a space night, in which parents viewed the children’s art work related to space and some space games were played. I was sorry to miss out
on being part of this. It would have yielded much valuable data as Space is a really big place would not doubt have been sung many more times as the curriculum focus on space was developed.

Fieldwork recommenced two weeks after the space night. At that time there were two university students doing their practicum with the Eager Beavers. These students had focused on current emerging interests in the children’s play; therefore new projects were evident around the room. Some of these interests were related to the changing weather, as it was now spring. The children were enjoying extended periods outdoors in the sunshine. A new garden was being planted by children and students working together, and bug collecting was being pursued by many of the children.

I led a sing-along after lunch on my first day back, and the children gathered around my guitar with enthusiasm and argued with each other about which songs to choose. We sang requests at first, which included several of my songs, but not Space is a really big place. So after five or six songs I started singing it. Gemma and Ethan joined in with great enthusiasm and several other children chimed in with the lines “space is a really big place”. Just as on previous occasions, most children shouted the countdown and energetically dramatised donning a space suit and doing up their seatbelts in their rockets. There was a feeling of familiarity in the way the children participated in the actions and snippets of singing.
I didn’t suggest singing the space song over the next few weeks, but waited to see if anyone would request it. In early November, someone did. Kai, one of the older boys, who had been much less engaged with me and with singing in the past, asked for the space song during group sing-along.

**Journal, 5 November, 2009**

Cory looked up with interest from a toy he was holding and began to sing along. Ethan and several of the oldest children also joined in confidently. *After we sang two verses Kai called out “What about rocket ships?”*

“What else is in space that we could sing about, as well as rocket ships?” I asked, thinking a few more words were needed to fit with the melody and rhythm of that section of the song. Kai thought for a moment and said “Astronauts. They go in the rocket ships”. *So we sang “There are astronauts in rocket ships, in space”.*

*I asked the children what else was in space, and Cory said “You know, those...thingies....”. Kai and I made a few suggestions and finally discovered that Cory was thinking of satellites. He said “There are hundreds of satellites”. So this line became the start of another verse.*

During rest time on that day song sheets were placed at the drawing table. Tara chose a drawing sheet containing the space song. “I’m drawing aliens
in space” she told me, “this one has one eye.” I sang Space is a really big place quietly as she drew. “Ten, nine, eight, seven, …” counted Cory as he drew on a song sheet. Kai chose a space song sheet and coloured blue for the sky. He pointed at the words on the paper and asked me “Where did you get this? I know; you copied it.”

“I made up the song” I told him. He looked at me for a moment but didn’t say anything. He continued to colour his page in dark blue. This was one of several instances of similar questions and responses from the children about the six songs. It seemed that the children were not particularly interested in my identity as a song writer.

Figure 5.25 Photograph: Tara drawing a picture of space on a song sheet
Over the next few weeks the focus on preparing for ‘graduation’ and the transition to school of about half the Eager Beavers children, as well as preparations for Christmas, increased and Space is a really big place wasn’t sung again. Many photos and videos were taken during this period.

Journal, 17 November, 2009

Ethan saw me using my voice recorder, asked if he could sing his own songs for a DVD onto my ‘space recorder’. I explained that I could make CDs to listen to and asked if he’d like one of those. I also told him I’d made a CD of me singing my songs for each of the children to get at the graduation. “To take home?” he asked. “Yes” I replied. “What songs are on it?” Ethan asked. I began to list them and he interrupted to ask if the space song would be on it. “That’s my favourite” he said.

Space is a really big place didn’t develop beyond ‘early childhood’ during my time at Schubert Road. This was partly because of the timing of the unexpected interruption to field visits, which occurred just at the peak of interest in space. However it did develop beyond infancy in relation to the responses of certain children to it, notably Cory, Ethan, Gemma and Kai. It was also an important song for Ethan as it seems to have been an inspiration for him to create his own songs. He went on to create another special song after his space song, his dump truck song, which is described in Chapter Four.
The process of creating a song about space, arising out of the interest of a group of Eager Beavers, was significant because it involved a ‘stillbirth’ and ‘re-birth’. The experience of the ‘stillbirth’ of the first song taught me a lot about the need for musical and aesthetic interest in a song, and for the provision of opportunities for a range of responses in a successful song.

*If a dinosaur came to your house*

After October we didn’t sing the dinosaur song again until the following year, as graduation celebrations and Christmas dominated group times and song choices in the interim. On the first field visit in 2010 Tara requested “the dinosaur song” during group sing-along. Since the oldest children had left Schubert Road to begin school, Tara was now one of the oldest Eager Beavers. It seemed that she felt more confident to make suggestions during group times than she had in the past, as she had rarely made song requests during the previous year.

*Journal, 2 March, 2010*

As I began to sing the children who had been Eager Beavers last year immediately began to pat their knees and join in singing “Stomp, stomp...”. Many of the younger children imitated them, and kept patting knees with the beat while I sang the song. Before we got to “You can hide”, Jack (aged three) called out “Hide! Hide!” I was fascinated that he had thought of this without knowing the song. It confirmed for me the strength of the logic of the narrative I had
created. I gave him a special smile as I sang “You can hide”, to acknowledge his suggestion.

The children had many ideas about places to hide from the dinosaur – in a cupboard, under the leaves, in the snow (!), under the sea, in the bathroom, under bed, behind the trees. Some of these ideas were similar to those that children had heard or suggested on previous occasions. However some were completely new.

*My usual practice is to repeat children’s ideas so that everyone can hear them, to ensure that the children know what to sing for the relevant line of the song. I realised on this day that I could easily by my tone of voice and body language, as well as my verbal response, place value judgements on the children’s suggestions, perhaps conveying messages that some suggestions are better than others. My philosophy as an early childhood educator is always to show respect for all children’s ideas, so that they feel they are valued. I realised on this day that I needed to be more careful to ensure that I was doing this fairly.*

Many of the suggestions, and much of the most rapt attention came from the new Eager Beavers. Charlotte was particularly fascinated. During the second verse of the song she ran over to a nearby toy shelf and brought me back a toy dinosaur. When I ended the song
after about ten verses, as it was time to move away from group time

she said, “I want to sing more dinosaur song”.

On my next visit one of the younger boys asked for the dinosaur song during group singing. Unfortunately I didn’t see exactly who it was. Straightaway a few children began patting their knees and saying “Stomp, stomp… ”. So I joined them and began the song. My general impression was of the whole group watching me intently and participating in the actions energetically, synchronising the pulse of their voices and hands for the “Stomp, stomp…” section. Quite a few children sang or chanted along with most of the words. I sang slowly, partly because this enhances the drama of the song, but also to allow the children space to lead the song. I noticed that many of them seemed to remember the narrative sequence.

As I sang, “You could run, you could hide” about eight hands went up. The first suggested hiding place was “under the bed”. Marian had a variation on this idea – “under the covers”. Phil suggested the cupboard. Then three or four of the youngest children chose under the bed as their hiding place. Many of these children put up their hands to contribute an idea but in fact hadn’t thought of one. They just seemed keen to be part of the experience. In each case they hesitated before making a suggestion we had already sung.

I made a point, as I have always done over many years in these situations, of honouring each child’s choice even if it is a repetition of another’s. Many
children seem to need experience of contributing ideas in group sessions before they gain the confidence to extend their imaginative thinking. I know that these contributions are not necessarily about music, but more about being part of the narrative conveyed through the lyrics and dramatic actions of the song. However as they are part of the sharing of a song, they can be seen as evidence of the ngoma of the way children experience songs (Bjørkvold, 1989). They can also be seen as evidence of CM (Malloch and Trevarthen, 2009), as the children are focused on communicating and making a shared narrative around a song.

Journal, 9 March, 2010

After we had sang about hiding under the bed quite a few times Molly suggested hiding “up in a cloud”. That gave me a really good idea for ending the song. “Do you think the dinosaur will find us up there?” I asked the children.

“No,” many of them replied.

“How will we get there?” I asked.

“We need wings,” said Charlotte. So we pretended to use wings (our arms) to get to a cloud, and that was the end of the song. I didn’t think fast enough to improvise a melodic narrative for this, I just used speech: “So the dinosaur couldn’t find us anywhere.”
This was a special moment. I have always found it exciting when children come up with a new idea in a song which no other child has ever suggested before. It is also interesting when one child’s idea inspires imaginative thinking by the rest of the group and this leads the interpretation of the song in a completely new direction. Molly’s suggestion was a wonderful example of this peer collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978). It came at a moment when some children were getting bored with repeating the same song so many times and were rolling around the floor and no longer participating. Molly’s idea thus provided a way to end to song, but it seemed a shame not to build on it. I hoped that on a future occasion it might lead to some further creative approaches to the dinosaur song.

There was tension in this instance between my roles as song writer, researcher and early childhood educator. The latter recognised that many children were no longer engaged with the song and that their restlessness needed to be understood and dealt with sensitively. However the former would have liked to explore this new direction in the narrative. I unfortunately didn’t take the opportunity to do this. I should have sought out Molly and started a discussion, but I didn’t think of it until writing up my notes later that day after leaving the centre.

This was one of many lost opportunities. Reflection on data after the completion of fieldwork shows the need for an ethnographic researcher with children to be creative and imaginative in recognising such opportunities and devising ways to draw out the children further. This type
of skill is in fact part of contemporary approaches to early childhood pedagogy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; NZ Ministry of Education, 1996; Rinaldi, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002). The importance of reflection in action (Schön, 1983) is highlighted for the educator as well as the creative artist/composer.

Even though in the previous calendar year when the graduating group were present, the children had seemed fairly interested in this song, in the new calendar year the interest was much stronger. This seemed to be driven by the youngest members of the group, most of whom had been in the Rainbow room at Schubert Road when my field visits commenced. This song was never requested spontaneously by the children last year, but this year it was requested regularly. This year’s group of Eager Beavers also seemed to maintain interest in the dinosaur song for longer than last year’s group had. The strong interest of the younger children was noted by Marian and Martin, who had been Eager Beavers the previous year, and who now seemed keen to show their superior familiarity with the song by joining in with the singing quite strongly. These two children, amongst the oldest in this year’s Eager Beaver group, contributed ideas much more often than they had before, and participated in singing with greater confidence.

So it was the familiarity with this song over time experienced by the longer term Eager Beavers, combined with the fresh interest in dinosaurs shown by the new Eager Beavers, which contributed to moving it to the next stage of its life cycle. In 2010 the children really began to play with the song in
creative ways, as is typical of childhood. They actively created their own narratives about dinosaurs using interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005) and worked together with me to create a shared musical narrative (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009).

**The little pigs’ chorus**

Very often in the later months of fieldwork in 2009, children would notice me writing in my notebook and ask if they could write in it too. My field notes are interspersed with many drawings, signed by the artist, and early attempts at writing.

**Journal, 24 November, 2009**

One day in November, a few weeks after the writing and introduction of ‘The little pigs’ chorus’, I was running out of pages in my current notebook. So when two of the older girls wanted to write in it I asked them to make sure they left me a few pages. “I need to write things about your singing and your favourite songs,” I said to them.

“My favourite song is..... [pausing to think]...the piggy song,” said Lola, and proceeded to sing the song while she drew some flowers in my note book. It was a perfect rendition, except that the first line was not repeated.
Because this song was part of the Eager Beavers’ graduation celebrations, Dana made a point of playing my CD for the children and singing along with it often. It is likely that this accounts for the children’s familiarity with the song. Most children became confident in singing it much more quickly than with any other of my songs. It is also the shortest, simplest and most repetitive of the new songs shared with the children at Schubert Road, except for *I’m a drummer in a band*. This was possibly another factor in the children’s confidence in singing it.

Two weeks after the song was first introduced to the children Dana decided that she would like to start making video recordings of performances of *The three little pigs*. So at mid-morning when it was time for outdoor play, a small group stayed in to perform the play, which I offered to video. When it came to the song at the end Dana turned on the CD of my voice for the children to sing along with.
On the first video recording the actors jumped energetically with the song. They mouthed the lyrics but few sang. The recording was playing quite loudly, so it dominated and the children focused mostly on dancing around. When the CD finished Dana asked everyone to sing along and played the audio recording again. Gemma and Lola, who were actors in this version, began singing and jumping as soon as they heard Dana’s instruction to sing, so they started ahead of the CD. A few of the other children, actors and audience, sang in time with the recording. About half way through Gemma and Lola seemed to realise and synchronised the pulse of their singing with the recording for the rest of the song. However, their pitch did not match my recording.
Gemma, who is a confident singer, led the singing and her pitch was reasonably accurate, although for part of one rendition she was not in tune with the recording. Most of the children were speak/singing, following the melodic contour of the song but with inaccurate intervals and unstable tonality. The actors out the front synchronised their rhythm accurately and thus led the rest of the children in keeping time if not pitch.

The group of actors in the first video performance knew the lyrics very well. The video recordings of *The little pigs’ chorus* recorded on this day and subsequently show many instances of the children playing with the song. For example, Alison, who played the wolf in this rendition, always tapped her chin with the beat when singing “not by the hairs of our chinny chin chin”. After the song finished on one recording a single voice could be heard singing a sort of echo of the last three notes of the song - “has gone away” - in a humorous voice.

I revisited the video recordings of *The little pigs’ chorus* many times, seeking to identify evidence of CM. Synchronisation of pulse was obvious, as already mentioned. There was some eye contact between children, but as they were performing for an audience with a video camera filming them, most children focused on the camera and to some extent on the audience of their peers. Given the common presence of cameras, both still and video, in these children’s lives at Schubert Road, and quite possibly at home, it was reasonable to surmise that they could have been seeking to interact with an implied audience of future viewers of the video recordings. Such imagined
audiences might be themselves and their peers, as video recordings and photo montages of experiences at the centre were regularly shown to the children during the afternoon rest time, or might be the children’s families at their homes.

After lunch on the day that many video recordings of The three little pigs were made, I sat down with my guitar to sing with the children. The little pigs’ chorus was amongst the songs requested by the children. Even though most of them had sung it quite a few times already that day, the enthusiastic participation indicated that their interest had been strengthened through repetition (Siebenaler, 1999).

Over the next few weeks several more versions of the play were video recorded. Many of the later recordings took place on the verandah and the CD wasn’t used for the song. The children launched very confidently into speak/singing The little pigs’ chorus, led nearly every time by Jessica, Gemma and Lola. These three sang the melody quite accurately and on each occasion several other children could be heard synchronising pitch with them.

In most video recordings where the CD wasn’t used, the children omitted the second line of the song, which is a repeat of the first line: “Hooray, hooray, we’re glad to say that the big bad wolf has gone away”. By this time the children seemed very familiar with the song, although the dance moves we had tried to work out with the children when the song was
introduced didn’t catch on. The children acting in the play preferred to jump and jog around excitedly as they sang. Sometimes audience members would stand up and join in with dancing. The way the children danced around is an example of song as ngoma (Bjørkvold, 1989), as the children’s music-making integrates singing, moving and playing.

In one of the video recordings, the song was led by the same three girls, Gemma, Lola and Jessica, even though they were not all actors this time. Bonnie, who played one of the pigs, tapped her chin when singing “not by the hairs on our chinny chin chin”, just as Alison had done on an earlier occasion. This action is a further instance of ngoma, where the children add gesture to their multi-modal musical play to communicate the meaning of what they are singing (Bjørkvold, 1989). It is likely that Bonnie used this gesture because she had observed Alison doing it. Bonnie, a quiet child who rarely sought attention or prominence in group interactions, was a keen observer who seemed to learn in this way.

On one of the later recordings of *The little pigs’ chorus* some children started to sing a repetition of the first line; but Dana, who was singing along with them, omitted this repeat, so the children followed her. Some children had obviously remembered the repetition from the CD and from singing the song with me.
Journal, 28 November, 2009

At lunch today, after we’d videoed the play several times, Lola began to sing the song while helping herself to food. She seemed to be unconscious of this (her focus was on lunch not on the song) until a few other children joined in and together they sang the whole song. Lola looked at me as I happened to be walking close by, bringing drinks to her table and said “You must be proud that we’re singing your song.”

“I certainly am” I replied.

Because The little pigs’ chorus was created for (and with) children at Schubert Road, its life cycle reflects many aspects of the musical cultures of the Eager Beavers explored in Chapter Four. In reflecting on the portrait, key themes discussed in Chapter Four are evident in the life cycle of The little pigs’ chorus.

Loudness

The children often shouted this song. The CD I had recorded gave a model of quieter singing, but because the song was sung at the end of the play, the children were often excited, especially the actors. The audience, as they’d been sitting fairly still, were possibly keen to be active. Often a few of the audience members at the front (the older children) would jump up to join in with the dancing of the actors while singing the song. The lyrics, especially
‘hooray’, possibly also encourage a loud, excited, jubilant approach to singing.

**Performance to an audience**

This was a key part of the life cycle of this song as it was composed to be part of a performance piece for a special occasion. Even though we encouraged the audience to sing, and some did, they also focused on watching, and listening to, the actors singing and dancing. As noted earlier, musical performance often occurred in structured group times as well as in the children’s spontaneous play. Whenever *The little pig’s chorus* was sung at the end of the performances of *The three little pigs*, the children’s responses showed they had a flexible view of the roles of performer and audience member. As noted on other occasions of performance play, they often moved between the two roles. During renditions of *The little pigs’ chorus*, some audience members often joined the performers in dancing and singing on the stage area. The children were quite confident in the way they sang this song as performers.

**Communicative musicality**

Data for one performance during which Dana used the CD showed that the children were out of synch with the timing of the recording for about half the song. Although they did begin to synchronise rhythm after about eight bars, they didn’t successfully synchronise pitch. When the song was sung without the CD the children mostly synchronised their sing/speaking pitch with strong singers, who became informal leaders of the singing. Gemma
and Jessica often unconsciously took on this role. Their pitch was fairly true to the song’s melody. For others, the melodic contour and some of the pitch were synchronous with the leading singers, but their rendition of the melody was not accurate. The dancing done by the children, which was focused mainly around jumping, was not accurately synchronous with the beat of the song. This may have been related to the fact that it was hard to jump quite fast enough. However the children did mostly synchronise their jumping with each other.

The children’s engagement with *The little pigs’ chorus* showed the influence of children’s mass market musical commodities: in particular the style of dancing of many of the children was similar to the dancing on DVDs of music produced for children such as the Wiggles and Hi 5. The children’s movement responses also showed similarities to dancing seen on pop music TV and DVDs.

**Coda: Bringing songs into cultures**

As children form relationships with songs and gradually integrate them into their existing musical cultures, they adapt the songs in a variety of ways (Campbell, 2002). Sometimes this may involve unconscious changes, such as the rhythmic variation in Little steam train, or the very fast steam sounds in the transition sections of this song. At other times children may make conscious choices to vary or extend lyrics, often in order to build a shared narrative, such as the imagined visit of a dinosaur in If a dinosaur came to
your house. Children generally engage with songs in ways related to their play or life interests, which may be individual but are often part of social cultures.

These conscious changes occurred many times in the life cycles of the six songs. In Little steam train the children chose to sing about different sized trains and to create a sequence from smallest to largest. In Space is a really big place they devised lyrics about a variety of things which can be found in space. In If a dinosaur came to your house the children chose different places to hide from the dinosaur.

The children in the Eager Beavers group sang many of the six songs as loudly and fast as they could, thus integrating key features of their musical culture into their interpretations of the songs. This aspect of the children’s music-making can be viewed as both an expression of their enjoyment of energetic physical actions and evidence of the influence of popular recorded music, which is often loud and fast. Indeed rock music, which uses mainly electronic instruments and drums, often has little dynamic variation. It is mainly loud or very loud. The children’s and staff’s interest in loud and fast music is an example of how children belong to, and are influenced by, a number of different sub cultures (families, neighbourhoods, ethnic groups, young children, the community of Schubert Road Child Care Centre) and intercultures (listeners to particular musical genres) (Slobin, 1993).
In Chapter Four of this thesis a question often considered by ethnomusicologists was posed: does music create or reflect cultures (Blacking, 1976; Merriam, 1964; Slobin, 1993)? Consideration of the prevalence of fast and loud singing and energetic physical participation in songs amongst the children of the Eager Beavers group shows elements of both creation and reflection. The interest in fast and loud singing and actions shaped the life cycles of several of the songs, as shown in the portrait in this chapter. These musical responses can be viewed as instances of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005), where the children have used elements of familiar musical cultures to actively influence the ways in which the six songs become integrated into the musical micro-culture (Slobin, 1993) of the Eager Beavers. Interpretive reproduction is a theoretical lens which epitomises the dynamic nature of cultures. Instances of interpretive reproduction in the life cycles of the songs show how the children’s responses were influenced by existing musical cultures while at the same time their interactions and adaptations extended these cultures.

The portrait of the life cycles of the six songs portrays extensively the children’s instinct for CM. The unconscious synchronisation of pulse and vocal quality and the communication used to create shared narratives convey an impression of the development of the songs happening in the context of the relationships at the centre – between peers, between me and the children, and between children and staff.
The portrait shows clearly that none of the six songs became fully integrated into the centre’s existing musical cultures. The portrait also conveys the centrality of interaction and social communication within the context of meaningful relationships to the children’s singing. The songs which were at the heart of the children’s musical cultures were songs they had known for most of their lives, such as Twinkle, twinkle little star, Baa baa black sheep, well-known Christmas carols, songs from the older albums by the Wiggles and songs commonly used for transitions in the Eager Beavers room. These were songs that the children had shared with families and/or with staff at the centre, people with whom they had deep and long-standing relationships. Although I did develop relaxed and friendly relationships with many children, the relatively short time spent at the centre was not long enough to allow me to become fully integrated into the life of the centre. This limitation of the research is discussed further in Chapter Six.

The fact that the six songs didn’t become fully integrated into the existing musical culture could also have been influenced by the fact that staff didn’t often sing them with the children. The three which came closest were those which Dana got to know via my CD and which she introduced to the children (Little steam train and I’m a drummer in a band) as well as the song created for the graduation play (The Little pigs’ chorus). Dana also used a CD to share this with the children, so that it was sung often when I wasn’t present. As already argued, the children’s engagement with these songs may have been strengthened by their strong relationship with Dana.
For these three songs there were more instances of spontaneous singing, requests for the song or statements of preference from some children than there were for the other three songs.

Little steam train and *I’m a drummer in a band* are both songs which invite physically energetic participation. This could also account for the children’s engagement with them. As this portrait showed, most children joined in with the actions of drumming or pretending to be a steam train with great enthusiasm, even if they didn’t sing much of either song.

Little steam train, *I’m a drummer in a band* and *The little pigs’ chorus*, the three songs for which Dana used my CDs to sing with the children, were perhaps the best suited for several aspects of the musical culture of the Eager Beavers. For example, they provided opportunities for loud and fast singing and energetic physical participation. Physical actions were indicated by the lyrics and form of Little Steam Train and *I’m a Drummer in a Band*. The use of *The little pigs’ chorus* as a finale to the graduation play also made it a song for dancing.

Another aspect of the centre’s musical culture which influenced the children’s engagement with the six songs was the interest of children and staff in staging performances for an audience, both formally and informally. *The Little pigs’ chorus* was of course created with this in mind. The other songs were not, but perhaps the lyrics of *I’m a drummer in a band* suggest the dramatic role of a performer. Little steam train, while not overtly a
The other song which came closest to becoming part of the children’s musical cultures was Look around at the colours. Observations of this revealed that the opportunity to interact with me by pointing out the stated colour was the most engaging aspect of this song for many children. This was interpreted as an act of social communication, the use of the song to create a shared narrative around the colours in the environment. This song had the longest life cycle, as it remained of interest to the continuing Eager Beavers and their new companions in the last three months of field visits at the start of 2010. The interactions around this song involving Molly with a small group of children, using the book I had created, showed her fully in control of the song and able to lead a group in singing it and sharing the book with them. Molly’s independent knowledge of this song represented a step further in its life cycle, at least for her.

**Songs for children, by children or with children?**

The songs children sing can be divided into three distinct categories: songs to be sung for children, with children or by children (Barrett, 2003a). As an early childhood educator who believes that children play an active role in co-constructing learning through relationships (Curtis & Carter, 2009; Rinaldi, 2006), I have sought to compose songs which have potential to be
far more than simply songs for children. I concur with Barrett’s view that children’s musical development is best served by adults who provide opportunities for children to be active participants in, and creators of, music, including songs. Therefore it is valuable for me as a practitioner researcher (song writer and educator) to analyse the six songs in relation to the three categories outlined by Barrett.

While four of the six songs were created for children, in that they were written away from children, all six of the songs were intended to be sung with, rather than for, children. This was achieved by writing songs with potential for participation and creative decision making by children. Some songs have limited opportunity for adaptation, notably *I’m a drummer in a band* and *Look around at the colours*; however these songs incorporate opportunities for individual turns, to drum or to find a colour, so that children are actively participating in the song with a song leader. The idea outlined earlier for adding a more open-ended question at the end of the colours song (“can you sing about the colours that you see around”) would allow the children to be creative with both lyrics and melody in singing individually an answer to the question. Therefore the song could partly become music by children. *I’m a drummer in a band* also has potential for music-making by children if the drummer is given freedom to create her own drumming rhythm patterns.

The two songs which were written for the Eager Beavers during the research were created for as well as with children. This was achieved in
Space is a really big place because the song lyrics incorporated ideas provided by the children, and any verses added to the first were the children’s lyrics, although the music of the song was created by me for the children. Thus this song is music with children. Space is a really big place was especially significant in relation to Barrett’s (2003a) definitions because it inspired Ethan to create his own space song – music by children. Little pigs’ chorus was composed to some extent with children, as Ethan, Gemma and Lola provided me with the lyrics for the first section. However I created the melody and form, so the song is also music for children. The children altered the structure when singing it independently, eliminating the repetition of the first line, which was another instance of this song being music with children.

Although If a dinosaur came to your house is an example of a song composed for children, it also provides scope for the children’s choice of lyrics so that they help to shape the narrative of the song. Therefore it is also an example of music with children. Likewise Little steam train, composed for children, allows them to engage in dramatic enactment and to vary lyrics, tempo and dynamics, so that it is a song for making music with children.

Analysis of children’s songs according to Barrett’s (2003a) definition provides a way of viewing songs from the perspective of children’s engagement with them. It is relevant to an exploration of the way new songs become part of existing musical cultures, as this integration happens
through interactive processes. Songs which have the potential for music-making with and by children are those which invite active engagement, allowing children not just to sing along, but to respond physically and creatively to the song.

This portrait has explored the ways children engaged with the six songs, in the context of the relationships and musical cultures of the Eager Beavers group at Schubert Road Child Care Centre. It was found that social interaction and both musical and social communication guided the children’s engagement, so that their relationships with peers, with me and with staff were central to the development of the lives of the six songs.

**Summary**

In this chapter portraiture was used to research and present the life cycles of six original songs. The creation of narrative portraits facilitated the organisation and interpretation of data through creating a story of the developing life of each song (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). The drawing together of six portraits into one over-arching portrait involved comparative exploration of the experiences of writing the songs and sharing them with children, so that emerging themes were presented and analysed.

The research design employed was largely ethnographic, as I became a temporary member of the field community and generated data within the normal daily routines of life at Schubert Road Children’s Centre. The use of
portrait to present the research takes it beyond ethnography into the aesthetic field of creative writing, thus combining “empirical and aesthetic description” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 13).

Portraiture was chosen mainly for its ability to present the research in an aesthetic way which would reflect my identity as a creative person. Narrative research methods such as portraiture have a unique potential to use the power of language and story to inspire readers with the authenticity of the research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997; Polkinghorne, 2007; Richardson, 2003). I hope that this has been achieved, so that this research has relevance and interest for a wider audience than that of academia. Portraiture was also employed because of its “explicit recognition of the use of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 14). As the creator of the six songs I was simultaneously researcher and researched, so it was appropriate to use a methodology which would allow for self-reflection. Further reflection on, and evaluation of, the research are the main focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Six:

Conclusion
Overview

This chapter brings the thesis to a close. It presents a summary of main findings and evaluative reflections on methodology and design, exploring challenges, benefits and limitations. The multiple roles of the researcher are discussed in relation to the methodological approaches employed in the mixed design. Implications of the research are drawn for researchers, song writers and educators in the fields of both early childhood and music education. Suggested directions for future research are proposed.

Introduction – the portraits in miniature

Research projects such as the one presented in this thesis provide an alternative perspective on young children’s singing to empirical studies which seek to test a hypothesis or measure aspects of singing behaviour. Empirical research in music education in the past has largely been underpinned by an individualised view of children’s development, influenced by theories such as those of Piaget (Ginsburg & Opper, 1988). These theories presume that all children develop similarly regardless of the circumstances of their lives. Until relatively recently educational research and practice has been dominated by these theories, which Walsh describes as viewing development as something that happens within each individual child. He has termed this “the eternal child” (2002, p. 102).
The research presented here is instead underpinned by an image of children’s development occurring in, and being shaped by, social and cultural contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Cole, 1996; Geertz, 1973; Walsh, 2002). Theories of cultural psychologists, following on from the work of Vygotsky (1978), now show that children’s development occurs through interaction, communication and relationships. Therefore research which focuses on seeking to explore aspects of children’s lives, relationships and culture will provide rich material for extending understandings of young children.

The main question posed in this research was: How do new songs become part of young children’s musical cultures? The life cycles of the six original songs showed that the children developed relationships with the songs through interaction with influential adults and peers within the cultural context of the early childhood setting. The narrative portrait contained in Chapter Five painted a picture of the children using their innate instinct for communicative musicality (CM) (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) to synchronise pitch and vocal quality with each other as they interacted to create shared narratives through and with the songs. Features of the musical culture of children and staff at the centre, representing a blend of musical cultures derived from family, community and media (Slobin, 1993), were evident in the children’s styles of engagement with the songs.

Peer interactions and friendships influenced the children’s engagement with the songs. The portrait showed many instances of interpretive reproduction
(Corsaro, 2005) - the children using knowledge and ideas from their life experiences and collaborating to shape, adapt and extend the songs and to gradually incorporate them into their existing musical cultures.

Chapter Four presented a portrait of the musical culture of the field setting: the Eager Beavers room at Schubert Road Child Care Centre. The aim of this portrait was to explore the cultural context into which the six songs were introduced, in keeping with the secondary research questions posed in Chapter Three. In the portrait, influences from wider family and community musical cultures were explored, as were the influences of peer and gender relationships amongst the children. Several themes which dominated the children’s engagement with songs and music-making were identified, and their influence was explored in tracing the life cycles of the six songs in Chapter Five. These themes were: an interest in social interaction, in loud and fast music, in performance to an audience, in energetic physical movement and in mass market, adult pop-style, recorded music for children.

**The portraitist**

Just as a visual portrait reflects the artist who painted it, through its content, techniques and style, so a narrative portrait reflects its author. The finished portrait conveys information about its subjects and its creator. In conducting the research which culminated in the creation of the narrative portraits contained in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis I adopted many roles, all
of which influenced the subject matter, perspectives and style of the portraits. These roles are set out in Figure 6.1 below.

![Figure 6.1 Roles of the researcher](image)

The research evolved out of my role over many years as an early childhood educator. Training and experience in this field led to the development of an image of young children underpinned by belief in their innate resourcefulness, creativity and musicality. In moving from the role of a generalist educator to that of a music specialist, this image continued to guide my approach to teaching and to forming relationships with children. The undertaking of classroom research into my teaching (Niland, 2005), which also involved study of theoretical literature, deepened my knowledge of young children and provided further evidence of their innate capabilities, especially their fundamental need to use play to communicate musically (Bjørkvold, 1989). The search for songs which would support this need led me to use my research findings and theoretical knowledge creatively as I began to write my own songs. In keeping with a reflective approach to pedagogy and practice which is advocated in current early childhood
curriculum, theory and research (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Rinaldi, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002) the next step was to research my practice as a song writer.

Knowledge and experience as an early childhood and music educator were central to the roles I adopted during all phases of the research. They provided motivation and information which informed the creation of the six songs. They also provided understandings about young children and early childhood settings, and skills in communication, interaction and observation essential for the conduct of ethnographic research in such a setting.

My training and extensive experience as an early childhood educator in settings very similar to Schubert Road Child Care Centre were dominant influences in the development of my identity and relationships at the centre. I was very aware of this and had considered the differences between the role of a teacher and that of a researcher in planning the fieldwork. The decision to adopt a least adult role (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Mandell, 1991) was made, with the aim of developing an identity and relationships in the field which would differ from those between educator and students.

Experience as an early childhood educator led to challenges in the successful adoption of the role of researcher, which were presented in Chapter Five. During fieldwork the use of the least adult role was regularly the focus of reflection in and on action (Schön, 1983). From moment to
moment it was necessary to remind myself of the characteristics of that role as I endeavoured to challenge instinctive educator responses to many situations with children.

Observation is a core skill needed by both educators and researchers. However there are important differences in the way each will respond to observations. The fieldwork undertaken in this research involved many instances where observations could lead to different actions for an educator as opposed to a researcher. As an ethnographic researcher seeking to allow children maximum agency in the research (Mayall, 2000; Clark & Moss, 2005; Lewis, & Lindsay, 2000) the least adult role, which allows children to initiate and lead interactions, meant that observations were documented and reflected upon, but not necessarily acted upon immediately. For educators, observations are also documented and reflected upon, but will very often lead to immediate responsive action, in order to pro-actively guide children’s learning and use opportunities for intentional teaching (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).

There were occasions during fieldwork when I made decisions to depart from the least adult role to best meet the needs of children in particular circumstances. A journal entry about Felix (18 August, 2009) is an example documented in Chapter Four. Overall, however, the use of the least adult role in functioning as an ethnographer led me to new insights into the value of observation for educators in deepening their understanding of children. It also provided an alternative perspective on the power relationships between
adults and children in early childhood settings (Mayall, 2000), as it showed that there are many situations in which children can be given more power in learning/teaching relationships than is usually assumed (Rinaldi, 2006).

There were three main challenges in adopting this way of relating to the children. The first was the need to break habits established over many years. To do this I had to continually remind myself to wait, watch and listen. These reminders were needed throughout the field visits.

The second was the children’s expectations that I, an adult, would adopt an authoritative role in relation to them (Mayall, 2000). This was an issue occasionally during free play times, when children would come to tell me about other children who were breaking rules or who were annoying them in some way. In these situations I was aware of the children’s requests reflecting their need to feel supported by adults. I therefore sought ways to assist, such as asking questions to guide them in finding ways to solve things for themselves, or directing them to a staff member. Very occasionally I was forced to intervene pro-actively when physical danger was imminent. There were also times when I abandoned the least adult role as I sensed the weight of children’s expectations of me as an adult, and didn’t want them to feel I was letting them down. As an early childhood educator (and an ethical researcher), I recognised that children’s sense of well-being should always be paramount, and that interdependence is an essential element of young children’s well-being (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).
Sometimes occasions arose where simple practical help, such as tying shoe laces or turning on a tap, was requested. It was necessary to assist children in this way, as it was visually obvious to them that I was a competent adult who could be relied upon. At these times, influenced by my experience as an educator, I sought empowering ways to offer such help (Mayall, 2000), working together with the child or children so that he/she/they could feel some competence at the task involved.

In a few situations, circumstances required the adoption of a more authoritative role, similar to that of other adults at the centre. These occasions highlight the third challenge to the use of a least adult role. In general the staff recognised that I was there for research and not as an educator, however the daily demands of routines in a busy child care centre are significant, and it would have been disrespectful not to have followed some aspects of the adult/child relationships which were part of the centre’s culture. Therefore I happily helped to tidy up, serve lunch, move furniture and perform other routine tasks. Some of these were shared by children and adults, so my participation was simply part of being at the centre. However others were adult roles, so my participation reinforced in the children’s eyes my being to some extent part of the team of adults who looked after them at Schubert Road. Participation in routine tasks also occasionally involved monitoring of children’s behaviour during those routines and the need to remind them of centre rules.
A further challenge to my adoption of a least adult role was the fact that I led daily sing-alongs, which placed me in a position of authority over the children. By sitting on a chair at the front of the group, who were seated on the floor, I was clearly, from the children’s perspective adopting an authoritative role to which they were accustomed, thus associating myself with the staff of the centre. This was a definite limitation in relation to researching in a participatory way with children. However given that in finding a centre for fieldwork, strong singing skills and musical knowledge were not a pre-requisite, it was necessary for me to lead singing of the six songs.

Sing-alongs could have been led differently from group times led by staff if seating arrangements had been varied. The children and I could have sat in a horseshoe or circle formation, with me seated on the floor with them. Unfortunately there was often insufficient floor space to do this; for example in the transition to rest time much of the open floor space was taken up with mattresses for the children who slept after lunch. The need to work within the usual practices of the centre led me to avoid making requests or arrangements which could disrupt the normal routines of the day or make extra work for staff.

The challenges in devising participatory approaches through the adoption of a least adult role were also related to the variety of different roles I played in the research. In leading singing with the children I was establishing my identity as the creator of most of the songs we were sharing. This provided
a link between the pre- and post- birth stages in the life cycles of the songs.

I was in a sense the parent of the songs, bringing them into being and setting them on their life paths. Lola’s comment to me about feeling proud of *The little pigs’ chorus*, documented in Chapter Five, showed that some children viewed me in that way as well. If I had simply taught the songs to an educator at the centre, then observed the children interacting musically with her, I would have had a singing relationship (a fairly short one) with that educator, but not directly with the children. However by leading singing groups I was able to communicate and develop relationships with the children through my role as a song writer.

In spite of the challenges involved, the experience of using participatory methods for researching with children led to new insights and lasting changes in my practice as an early childhood educator. In particular the least adult role led to increased recognition of the value and potential benefits of altering the balance of power in adult child relationships in favour of the children. Interaction with children in this new way provided a different perspective from that gained in the past as an educator. For me, this was one of the most important reciprocal benefits of the research. Although the literature on participatory approaches to researching with young children, which critiques traditional power roles and relationships, inspired the design of this research (Christensen, 2004; Mayall, 2000; Pole, 2007), it was the experience of actually using these approaches which truly showed how important they are in respecting the rights of children to be active agents in their own learning and development.
Knowledge and experience as an early childhood educator and researcher were central to the creation of music and lyrics for the six songs. The conception and gestation stages of their life cycles contain many examples of decisions influenced by theoretical literature and past observations of children. Musical decisions were made on the basis of knowledge of theory and practice of early childhood music education. Lyric decisions were influenced by knowledge of children’s interests gained through experience and underpinned by beliefs about the innate capabilities of young children. These beliefs, gained through both early childhood educational practice and research, were particularly influential in guiding decisions made to shape the songs so that they provided opportunities for children’s playful, active and creative engagement.

**Tools and techniques**

The tools and techniques used in the design of this research were those of ethnography, portraiture, arts-based and practice-led research, and participatory research with children. Literature explored in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis informed the approach to fieldwork in particular. Portraiture and the creative arts research methodologies were the main influences on the approach employed in exploring the writing of the six songs. In this section the use of each of these methodologies is evaluated and discussed.
Ethnography

Ethnography was chosen as part of the methodology for this research because it focuses on exploring lived experience in a community setting, with the researcher becoming a temporary member of the community (Chambers, 2002). This is an ideal approach for research with young children as it allows extended time in the field and a range of interactions between researcher and participants. The strong relationships which can be formed allow for generation of authentic data which reflects context and culture as well as individual perspectives (Chambers, 2002).

This approach did lead to the generation of rich and varied data which portrayed a view of young children’s singing and relationships with songs not achievable otherwise. However the complexities and changeability of a real life setting also presented challenges and meant that the researcher needed to be flexible and to adapt data generation strategies often. Successful data generation in ethnographic research involves skilful and sensitive communication between researcher and participants - early childhood staff in particular in this research - to enable the needs of the researcher to be met with minimum disruption to the ongoing life of the community. During my fieldwork there were many challenges of this nature. These mainly impacted on the generation of data to convey the children’s points of view and are explored below.
Participatory approaches to researching with children

The focus of the fieldwork phase of this research was to understand and portray the children’s perspectives (Christensen, 2004; Clark & Moss, 2005) on the six songs. The design of fieldwork was planned to incorporate data generation and interpretation strategies which would facilitate this. The use of ethnography was a key part of the research design, with extended time spent as a temporary member of the community of the field site. This enabled me to develop open, friendly relationships with children and staff. The adoption of a participatory approach in relation to the children involved the implementation of strategies designed to give children power in their relationships with the researcher. These included the use of the least adult role, informal conversations (Mayall, 2000), and the generate data in a range of media, so that children could convey their responses as they wished or were able to (Clark & Moss, 2005). I especially strove to create a culture of listening (Rinaldi, 1999 as cited in Clark & Moss, 2001) in order to generate rich and valid data, so that the research would have resonance for its diverse audiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997).

The use of participatory methods was not achieved as intended for several reasons. These related chiefly to time and cultural constraints, but also to the difficulty in developing suitable audio strategies for generating data with the children. Contemporary approaches to early childhood curricula stress the centrality of relationships in learning and teaching processes (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Curtis & Carter, 2008; Office of Child Care NSW, 2006) and stress that stability over time is important in
establishing positive relationships. The commencement of fieldwork in late July 2009 meant that it was only possible to work with the graduating group of children for five months. Although some rich data were generated over this period, reflections presented in Chapter Five show that longer time with this group was needed to form deeper relationships.

Time spent in generating data and in cycles of reflective and interpretive journaling eventually led to the development of some valuable strategies for data generation and interpretation with children. Several of these developments only occurred in the last two months of fieldwork, indicating that 10 to 12 months with the same group of children (in the same calendar year) would have been beneficial. As a researcher I needed sufficient time in the field as well as time exploring and analysing data to devise the most appropriate data generation strategies.

Extended time with the same group of children may have led to the six songs becoming more fully integrated into the musical culture of the Eager Beavers group, partly because it would also have allowed more time for staff to engage with the songs. Commencement of fieldwork at the start of the year and continuation for a whole single calendar year may have provided greater opportunities for becoming more familiar with families, so that a further source of data could have been utilised.

Providing opportunities for children to converse in relation to data, and building a culture of listening (Rinaldi, 1999 as cited in Clark & Moss,
(2001) is essential for the success of participatory research with young children. In ethnographic research the researcher must operate within the normal routines and cultural practices of the field community. Therefore the context for generating data through reflective conversations and the development of sustained shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007) are influenced by existing cultures. The culture of Schubert Road Child Care Centre was one in which relationships between children and long term staff members were friendly and trusting. Informal conversations were a part of life there, however staff changes and shortages meant that staff were often very busy and were rarely able to sit and converse with children for very long. Therefore the children were unused to engaging in sustained shared thinking. There are several instances of attempts to develop this level of reflective conversation with children around DVDs or song sheets which were not successful in eliciting interpretive responses to these data.

The limited success in relation to the use of participatory methods for working with children in this research relate chiefly to implementation rather than design of the fieldwork. The use of an ethnographic approach was essential as it provided the most potential for establishing strong relationships with the children. However the development of strategies to plan and communicate more with staff in order to create opportunities for some adaptations to routines and practices would have led to the children’s perspectives being more fully captured. A longer period of fieldwork within the same calendar year would also have helped with this, as more time was needed to build a culture of listening (Rinaldi, 1999 as cited in Clark &
Moss, 2001) and through this to work with the children to devise a greater range of appropriate data generation strategies.

Table 6.1 below sets out the data sources for each of the six songs, in both the song writing and fieldwork phases. It shows that a range of sources were used, but not uniformly for every song. Clark and Moss (2005) stress that the use of data sources which allow children to communicate in a range of different styles, to suit individual personalities, interests and levels of development, enables the researcher to most fully elicit the perspectives of young children. Table 6.1 shows how this was attempted in this research. It reveals gaps and inconsistencies in the use of data sources which could be addressed in future research. Because of the nature of ethnography, complete consistency is not always achievable. Researching in a living community means that days do not necessarily proceed as planned, and the researcher must be flexible (Van Maanen, 2002) and work harmoniously with community members. Nevertheless the use of a table such as this enables the researcher to analyse her use of strategies and techniques to ensure that data is generated from a range of perspectives.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Train</th>
<th>Drummer</th>
<th>Colours</th>
<th>Dinosaur</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Little pigs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Song writing – reflection on observation &amp; experience; improvisation with lyrics &amp; music; reflective journal on process</td>
<td>Song writing – reflection on observation &amp; experience; improvisation with lyrics &amp; music; reflective journal on process</td>
<td>Song writing – reflection on observation &amp; experience; improvisation with lyrics &amp; music; reflective journal on process</td>
<td>Song writing – observation of children’s space play; shared book reading about space; conversation stimulated by books and play; children’s drawings; improvisation with lyrics &amp; music; reflective journal on process</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CD heard by children/staff</td>
<td>CD heard by children/staff</td>
<td>CD heard by children/staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observation of sing-along led by Dana</td>
<td>Observation of sing-along led by Dana</td>
<td>Observation of spontaneous singing</td>
<td>Observation of spontaneous singing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio recording of sing-alongs</td>
<td>Audio recording of sing-alongs</td>
<td>Audio recording of sing-alongs</td>
<td>Audio recording of sing-alongs</td>
<td>Audio recording of sing-alongs</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videoing of sing-alongs</td>
<td>Videoing of sing-alongs</td>
<td>Videoing of sing-alongs</td>
<td>Videoing of performances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant observation in sing-alongs</td>
<td>Participant observation in sing-alongs</td>
<td>Participant observation in sing-alongs</td>
<td>Participant observation in sing-alongs</td>
<td>Participant observation in sing-alongs</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field notes &amp; daily reflective journal</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; daily reflective journal</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; daily reflective journal</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; daily reflective journal</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; daily reflective journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documentation of children’s ideas for lyric adaptation</td>
<td>Documentation of children’s finding of stated colour</td>
<td>Documentation of children’s ideas for lyric adaptation</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation stimulated by photo-illustrated book of this song</td>
<td>Conversation stimulated by sharing of illustrated book of this song</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conversations stimulated by song drawing sheets</td>
<td>Conversation stimulated by song drawing sheets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conversation stimulated by sharing of drum during free play times</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conversation with staff member</td>
<td>Conversation with staff member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Videoing of solo by child</td>
<td>Video of spontaneous singing by small group</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.1 Data sources for the six songs

Creative arts research methodologies

The creative arts methodologies of arts-based inquiry and practice-led research involve the use of an art form as the basis of every aspect of the research (Austin & Estrella, 2005). These methodologies were influential in the design and implementation of this research in that songs and singing were central: to its aims, research questions, researcher roles, data generation, analysis and presentation. As music therapy researchers Estrella & Forinash state: through arts-based inquiry “We gain a perspective that can only be gained through an artistic relationship” (Estrella & Forinash, 2007, p. 379). Practice-led research employs the reflective processes which are integral to the production of an art work in a systematic way as required in qualitative research (Barrett 2007a; Vaughan, 2009). The focus on reflection supports the mixed methods design of this research, as reflection is central to all of them: ethnography, early childhood, participatory research with young children and creative arts research.

Practice-led research seeks to explore the processes of creative production, systematically analysing the work of the artist/research practitioner. Techniques, strategies, underlying thought processes and influential knowledge are explored, viewed as data to be interpreted and analysed.
(Barrett, 2007a). In this research the pre-birth stages of the life cycles of the six songs were investigated in this way. The use of creative arts research methods enabled a focus on the artist/researcher which was reflexive rather than objective, and provided a rationale for the adoption of a postmodern approach to the role of researcher (Taylor, Wilder & Helms, 2007; Barone & Eisner, 2006).

Creative arts research methodologies also influenced the decision to employ the narrative approach of portraiture. Just as the creative art of song writing was at the centre of the research aims and processes, so the creative art of narrative writing was used to interpret and present the story and outcomes of the research.

**Portraiture**

Portraiture was a valuable methodology for this research because of its focus on using an aesthetic approach and because the concept of the researcher as portraitist was particularly suited to my multiple roles. In portraiture, the aesthetic device of metaphor is often used to convey interpretive meaning, a device which was central to the portraits presented in this thesis. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) liken portraiture to the weaving of a tapestry characterised by four dimensions. These dimensions, which are described in Chapter Three, provide a useful framework for evaluative reflection on the processes and outcomes of this research.
The first dimension is termed ‘Conception’ and refers to the use of a thread or theme to bind the narrative. The six songs form an aesthetic thread, as their story is the focus of the portrait in Chapter Five. Interwoven with this are the main theoretical underpinnings: in particular the theories of *communicative musicality* (CM) (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) and *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2005).

The second dimension is termed ‘Structure’. Interpretation and analysis of data around the six songs according to stages of a metaphorical human life cycle – Conception, Gestation, Birth, Infancy and Childhood – created a structure for the portrait. The life cycle also provided a lens for theoretical analysis with reference to a range of disciplines: music psychology, ethnomusicology, sociology of childhood, early childhood pedagogy, music education and music therapy. The structure of the portrait using the life cycle stages enabled the comparative analysis of the six songs at each stage of their lives, so that both similarities and differences in relation to major themes could be explored.

The third dimension is termed ‘Form’. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) stresses the inter-relationship between structure and form and regards the combination of the two as being critical to bringing the portrait to life for an audience. Techniques such as imagery, vignettes, illustrations or artefacts are aspects of form which help to create a “texture of intellect, emotion, and aesthetics” (1997, p. 254) and work together with structure to create an authentic and convincing portrait. In the portrait presented in Chapter Five,
the life cycle metaphor provided a thread to draw the reader through the narrative, and the inclusion of journal extracts, photos and artefacts created by the children and the researcher served to add the rich textural elements Lawrence-Lightfoot describes to the portraits in both Chapters Four and Five.

The fourth dimension of the tapestry is termed ‘Cohesion’, which is achieved by the researcher as portraitist / author analysing data using theoretical literature to identify key themes and issues and weaving these into the portrait. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) ‘Cohesion’ is central to the achievement of resonance, which is an important aspect of the conduct of valid research. The portraits in this thesis present a cohesive view of songs as vehicles for communication and meaning-making, and of singing as a social experience for the children of the Eager Beavers.

Validity
For the purposes of this research, validity was conceived within the methodological frameworks of narrative research (Polkinghorne, 2007) and portraiture. In the blend of methodologies used, the researcher was positioned as both insider and outsider (Reed-Danahay, 2009), so that more traditional conceptions of validity, based on avoidance of observer bias, were not relevant. As song writer and singer I was a participant in the research; as ethnographer I was a participant observer in the fieldwork phase; as portraitist I created portraits based on my multiple identities: related to life experience as well as to my roles in the research.
There are several approaches to validity often employed by qualitative researchers which were incorporated into the design of this research. One was the use of triangulation – the generation of data in a variety of ways (Flick, 2009). This is a key feature of research which aims to involve children as authentic participants (Clark & Moss, 2001; Pole, 2007). A variety of data generation techniques was used in the creation of the portraits in Chapters Four and Five, including field notes, audio and video recordings, photos and artefacts created by children. Another approach used in striving for validity is to share research data and interpretations with other participants (Polkinghorne, 2007). This was attempted, but with limited success, as documented in Chapter Five and discussed earlier in this chapter.

In this research I strove to achieve validity through resonance. The four strands of the tapestry of portraiture were created in order to present research that would be viewed as authentic, engaging and credible by audiences – of researchers, educators and children. Polkinghorne (2007), like Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) and proponents of arts-based research (Barone & Eisner, 2006), believe that validity can only really be judged by research audiences. As Polkinghorne says: “The validity of the story is attested to by its rich detail and revealing descriptions” (p. 483). In this research I have endeavoured to create portraits that are rich in detail, engagingly written and inclusive of a range of media and analytical perspectives.
The audience

The purpose of art is to communicate with an audience. Paintings are created to be viewed, literature to be read, music to be performed and heard. Traditionally, academic research is shared predominantly with an audience of researchers and research students. Contemporary perspectives such as post-modernism acknowledge the potential value of sharing research with a wider audience (Barone & Eisner, 1997, 2006). The purpose of research is to build knowledge and understanding, with the aim of bringing about change. In the fields of early childhood and music education, this means that research should be shared with practitioners (educators) as well as academics. Given that children are participants in early childhood education, and according to current thinking have the right to share in decisions and processes of their education (Clark & Moss, 2005; UN, 1989) they too represent a potential audience for this research. Portraiture and participatory approaches to working with children were employed partly in recognition of the value of sharing my research with an audience beyond the academy. Research which is presented in a creative, aesthetic format has the potential to communicate with and inspire audiences (Barone & Eisner, 2006). Practitioner and child adaptations of the outcomes of this research are contained in Appendices 1 and 2.
Limitations of the research

Consistent with the nature of ethnography, this research is necessarily limited in scope, as it explored one small community – that of an early childhood centre – and focused on a group of approximately 30 children. These children’s engagement with new songs was studied in relation to their specific social and cultural contexts. Although many aspects of these contexts would have much in common with those of other similar settings in Australia, the musical and social cultures of the Eager Beavers group of children at Schubert Road Child Care Centre were a unique blend of individuals, social interactions, life experiences and cultural influences. Therefore findings cannot be generalised.

This research was to a certain extent auto-ethnographic (Reed-Danahay, 2009), as the researcher role and data generation included focus on the researcher as a creative arts practitioner (song writer and singer). The identity of the researcher was a unique combination of artist/ educator/researcher. This is a further reason for the limited scope of the research. It would only be possible to replicate the research to some extent in terms of methods used, and even then data generation strategies would need to reflect the environment and cultural contexts of the field site. Further research could seek to extend understanding through similar investigations in other early childhood settings, however given that social and cultural contexts were both a consideration and an aspect of data generation, each new research setting would be a new and unique context to be explored.
Data generated in this research were also limited due to time constraints, which have been discussed in relation to the use of participatory approaches to researching with young children. A full, single calendar year or even two years would have enabled greater depth of relationships, more opportunities to communicate with staff and families, and most importantly more time for all participants to become familiar with the six songs. Extended time would thus have led to richer and more varied data which could have encompassed a greater range of perspectives on the songs.

Nevertheless, a clear picture emerged from this research of communication, social relationships and play being at the heart of the children’s relationships with the six new songs. Data also portrayed the significant influence of broader community musical cultures on the children’s singing and their engagement with the six songs.

**Implications**

This study showed young children using singing and songs as vehicles for communication, social interaction and meaning-making. It also showed that play was central to these children’s singing and to the relationships they developed with songs. These findings support previous research into young children’s singing (Barrett, 2006; Bjørkvold, 1989; Niland, 2005; Whiteman, 2001). They showed that children were most engaged in singing when it was approached through play, as play allowed the children some agency in guiding or leading the interpretation of a song. Findings also
showed that when singing, the children sought opportunities for communication and social interaction with adults and/or peers, using their instinct for CM to synchronise pulse and vocal quality with fellow singers.

**For early childhood and music educators**

These findings have implications for early childhood educators in relation to song selection and ways of singing with children. They showed that children’s engagement was enhanced by the provision of opportunities to participate in shaping songs through choices of lyrics and styles of response. They pointed to the value of linking songs with children’s play interests, and including songs in free play as well as structured group situations. In particular they pointed to the power of songs as tools for building relationships between peers and between children and adults.

Research findings in relation to song selection indicate that the most engaging songs are those which enable children to participate in a range of ways, including creative shaping of the song (Bjørkvold, 1989; Niland, 2005). Barrett’s analysis of music and songs for young children according to their potential for music-making for, with or by children (Barrett, 2003a) is relevant to the findings of this research. The engagement of the children of the Eager Beavers group with the six songs show the role of active participation (music by or with children) in leading to the development of relationships between the children and the songs and hence to the evolving life cycles of the songs.
While early childhood educators may often use songs primarily for non-musical reasons (Crowther, 2008), this study’s findings supports those of other research in highlighting the experience of singing in early childhood as a basis for musical development (Choksy, 1988; Shehan Campbell & Scott Kassner, 2010). Therefore the findings of this study are relevant for both early childhood and music educators. By engaging children in meaningful singing experiences which are social, playful and creative, educators can foster the development of positive dispositions (Claxton & Carr, 2004) towards singing. These can then enhance the role of singing in early music education.

Songs are often selected by music educators for their potential to achieve goals related to encouraging the awareness of musical concepts and development of musical skills (Forrai, 1988; Shehan Campbell & Scott Kassner, 2010). Young children are naturally drawn to music, especially songs. Research into mother/infant musical interactions and CM (Bannan, 2002; Bannan & Woodward, 2009; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009; Papousek, 1996; Trevarthen, 2000) indicate the innate musicality of children. For music educators the challenge is to find ways to use this natural interest to actively engage young children with songs so that developmental goals may be achieved. The findings of this study are relevant for music educators in that they provide insights into song features and styles of singing interactions which will engage children. Music education text books often provide guidelines for song selection and singing based on the musical attributes of a song, with little or no attention given to engaging children’s
interest (Forrai, 1988) or in relating songs to children’s lives. The findings of this study support contemporary approaches to early childhood curriculum which highlight the importance of meaningful learning experiences connected to children’s contexts and life experiences (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; NZ Ministry of Education, 1996).

**For song writers**

The responses of the children of the Eager Beavers group to the six songs provide insights for song writers into the centrality of social communication, interaction and play in children’s engagement with songs. They show that CM underpins children’s interest in active participation in songs in social contexts. The implication for song writers is the need to create songs which have the potential for these styles of engagement. Children may gain aesthetic pleasure in listening to songs which are musically familiar and are about topics of interest to them. However they will form the strongest relationships with songs which allow them to interact playfully to shape the way the song comes to life.

**For researchers and for future research**

Just as contemporary approaches to child development recognise the centrality of context and culture (Walsh, 2002), so contemporary researchers in music and music education are increasingly recognising the importance of studying children’s music-making in relation to wider contexts (Campbell & Lum, 2007; Young, 2007). The research presented in this thesis has shown that there are many benefits for researchers in
undertaking long term research in field settings, so that children are studied in the contexts of their daily lives.

This research highlighted the importance of extended periods of time in the field for gathering rich data and especially for researching with, rather than on, children. Literature reveals that this participatory research has been effectively used to seek children’s perspectives on many aspects of their lives and education, but has rarely been used to seek children’s perspectives on singing or music, especially those of children under six years of age. There is much scope for pursuing this type of research.

The fieldwork phase of this research revealed that there were many challenges to conducting participatory research with young children. One of the challenges outlined related to aspects of educational culture. Contemporary early childhood curricula stress the importance of challenging traditional roles and relationships to create more collaborative learning environments (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Curtis & Carter, 2008; Rinaldi, 2006). This provides a significant rationale for the conduct of participatory research with young children, and highlights the link between early childhood pedagogy and research. My research revealed the importance of relationships in the processes of researching as well as in the life cycles of the six songs. This fact supports the value of research undertaken by educators: as permanent members of an early childhood community they have strong and trusting long term relationships with children and their families, relationships that would enable them to generate
rich data and to involve children as participants in all parts of the research process.

The development of suitable data generation strategies for the aural media of music was another significant challenge in seeking to gain children’s perspectives on songs and singing. The mainly visual strategies and materials used by other researchers (Clark & Moss, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2005) were not adequate for this research. Over time some alternative strategies were devised, but there is much potential for further experimentation, particularly in the use of digital media. Appropriate digital media could also be employed to allow children to have more autonomy and control in the processes of generating and revisiting data. This could enrich their experience of music curriculum as well as enriching research outcomes.

The scarcity of systematic research on the content of songs for young children represents a significant gap which future research could fill. Blacking (1967) and Nettl (1983) have undertaken ethnomusicological investigation of children’s songs in several non-western cultures. Music education practitioner literature contains analytical discussion on aspects of children’s songs relevant to pedagogy (Campbell, & Scott-Kassner, 2006; Forrai, 1988). Some significant research has been done into children’s spontaneous songs (Barrett, 2006; Bjørkvold, 1989; Whiteman, 2001) and into playground and other child-initiated songs and musical games (Campbell, 1998; Marsh, 2008). However no systematic investigation of the
features of contemporary composed children’s songs exists. There is also very little research into the creative processes of song writers writing for children outside music therapy research (Baker, Wigram, Stott & McFerran, 2009). These are areas for further research which could build on the outcomes of the research presented in this thesis.

Conclusion

Singing and songs add richness and pleasure to all our lives, albeit they are often listened to rather than participated in. Contemporary research into the foundations of musicality (Cross & Morley, 2009; Dissanayake, 2009; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009), as well as research in ethnomusicology (Blacking, 1976) and music therapy (Baker & Wigram, 2005), show that music is a necessary part of life, for children and adults. Research such as that presented in this thesis provides evidence of the centrality of social and musical communication, relationships and play to young children’s singing, and by implication, the centrality of singing and music to children’s lives.

This research brought new songs and increased pleasure in singing to a group of children. Its presentation in several diverse formats to meet the needs of diverse audiences enables its findings, which point to the value of songs and singing, to be more widely disseminated to those who share in singing with children.
The greatest gifts of the research are portrayed by Felix’s huge smile as he shared the book of Look around at the colours with Molly, Danni and me, described in Chapter Five, and by Ethan’s greeting to me one sunny spring morning:

**Journal, 20 October, 2009**

The children were playing outdoors when I arrived. I sat down on the verandah near some children and waited to see who would approach me. After a little while Ethan came running up and stopped behind me. He draped his arms around my neck, placed his *chin on my shoulder and gave me a hug*. “Did you bring your guitar today?” he murmured in my ear, “because I REALLY need to sing a song.”

I went to get my guitar and he had a long turn, strumming while I held my fingers on the fret board in the position of an E major chord, then taking over and using his fingers on the fret board in imitation of mine. He strummed, moved his left hand and sang/chanted with perfect synchronisation of pulse. A group of children *gathered to listen to him*. “Sing your dump truck song,” his friend Cory asked him. “Yeah, dump truck song,” echoed Phil. Ethan looked at the circle of expectant, upturned faces, grinned and began his song.
Reference List


343


Weddell, C. The child audience. In S. Wright (Ed.), Children, meaning-making and the arts (pp. 135-166). Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education Australia.


Appendix Two reference list of illustrations

Music image on front cover
http://www.vector-clip-art.com

Rainbow
http://www.vectorforfree.com

Coloured pencils

Stars
http://www.123rf.com

Brachiosaurus
http://www.justclipart.org

Stegasaurus

Tyrannosaurus rex

Drum kit
http://www.Webweaver.nu

Djembe
http://www.cksinfo.com

Snare drum
http://www.classroomclipart.com

Tiny train
http://www.cksinfo.com

Sketched train
http://www.freeclipartnow.com

Three pigs and wolf
http://www.Keywordpicture.com
Appendix One:

Annotated song collection for practitioners
Introducing the collection

This collection contains six original songs that were the focus of research into the processes by which children build relationships with new songs and make them part of their musical cultures. The songs were written by the researcher and the collection includes the music manuscript and lyrics for each song, as well as edited versions of the narrative ‘portraits’ created from research data. An audio recording of the six songs (Appendix Three of this thesis) accompanies this collection.

Why research children’s songs?

During many years of singing with children as an early childhood educator, I have experienced the process through which songs become part of the life and musical culture of an early childhood setting. In recent years, as a song writer, I have gained a new perspective on this process, seeing it as a form of life cycle. A desire to better understand the development of this life cycle inspired my decision to investigate the lives of a group of my songs within the musical culture of one early childhood setting.

Several years ago I undertook action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000) into young children’s engagement with songs, to reflect on and improve my practice as an early childhood music educator (Niland, 2005). The knowledge gained through that research led me to start writing my own songs. As I began to sing these with children I became fascinated by the experience of being part of the metaphorical birth of the songs.
In my earlier research I had been interested in discovering what aspects of songs were most engaging for young children. Now, as a song writer and singer introducing children to brand new songs, I saw that children’s engagement with songs led to them developing relationships with those songs, as they gradually took them into their existing musical cultures. Whereas in my earlier research I had focused mainly on analysing the influence of play and musical development on the children’s responses to songs, in this research I have focused on children’s use of songs as means of communication and interaction, and on the role of songs in the formation of children’s social and musical cultures.

The aim of this annotated collection is to share the outcomes of my research with those who sing with young children (early childhood and music educators) as well as with an academic audience. The presentation of the research in a format especially for educators is in keeping with contemporary approaches to early childhood that see teachers as researchers and stress the value of a reflective approach to pedagogy (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Rinaldi, 2006).

**Children and music**

Music and children seem to go together. Anyone who spends time with young children will attest to their interest in singing, dancing and exploring musical instruments. Music, including songs, has been a part of every culture throughout history (Blacking, 1976). It is now widely argued that humans are innately musical beings and that music is a necessary part of
life (Dissanayake, 2006; Malloch, 1999/2000; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). Recent study of mother/infant communication supports this, as it shows the inherently musical nature of these interactions (Cross, 2003; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). Young children’s innate musicality is often expressed through singing (Campbell, 1998; Whiteman, 2001) and their songs play a role in the cultures of most early childhood educational settings. Though styles and contexts may vary, songs are commonly an integral part of a young child’s day.

**Research methods**

The ‘lives’ of six of my songs were explored from their creation to being sung with children. The basis of my research method was ethnography, an approach aimed at building understanding of aspects of life rather than testing a hypothesis. The research had two strands: the writing of the songs and the sharing of them with children. These were drawn together through a narrative method known as portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davies, 1997). The lives of the songs were interpreted using the metaphor of a human life cycle. This annotated collection contains a miniature narrative portrait of each song. The stages of the life cycle are set out in the table below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conception</th>
<th>The original idea for each song, its origins and rationale.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gestation</td>
<td>The creation of music and lyrics, processes and rationale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>The initial sharing of the song with children and adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Singers’ initial engagement with the song as they become familiar with the melody and lyrics of the song.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>The song becomes well-known and singers begin to take ownership and play with the song, perhaps adapting or extending it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>The song becomes an on-going part of the musical culture of the early childhood setting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In exploring the creation of the songs I used journaling to document my song writing, beginning with the initial decisions on song topics and tracing the processes of creating lyrics and melodies. The journals contained brainstorming of ideas – concepts related to the topics, words and phrases, notes on potential forms of participation - as well as musical ideas – snippets of melody and rhythm, notes on tonality and form. My notes contained many links between musical and textual ideas and theoretical knowledge of musical development, music education and early childhood pedagogy.
Journals were also part of the data generated during field work. This phase, in which the songs were shared with children, involved spending eight months as a temporary member of the ‘Eager Beavers’ room, a playroom for children aged between three and six years in a child care centre in the outer western suburbs of Sydney, Australia. I made two visits per week for the first five months and one visit per week for the following three months. Data generated during field work included journal notes, written observations, scribed conversations, audio and video recordings, photos and children’s drawings.

The literature I explored in designing and carrying out the research came from a range of traditions: early childhood, music education, music psychology, ethnomusicology, sociology and creative arts. Contemporary participatory approaches to researching with young children, developed by early childhood and sociology researchers, were especially important. These approaches recognise children as capable and resourceful (Clark & Moss, 2001; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009; UN, 1989), with voices to be heard and the right to take part in decision-making which effects their lives. In keeping with this view, I worked to involve children as actively as possible in decisions around data generation and interpretation.

**Wearing many hats: Researcher/ song writer/ singer**

While writing the songs I was simultaneously researcher and researched, as I analysed my creative decisions and the evolving content of the songs. This
phase of the research became the conception and gestation phases of the life cycle of each song in the narrative portraits developed from data. My knowledge of early childhood pedagogy and my experience as an early childhood educator emerged as key influences in the writing of the songs. Data showed that I continually shifted perspectives or ‘changed hats’ - from creative artist to educator to researcher - during the ‘pre-birth’ stages of the songs’ life cycles.

In the field work phase my role in the early childhood setting was that of participant observer (Macionis & Plummer, 2005). I became a temporary member of the ‘Eager Beavers’ community, interacting with the children during play, routines and structured group times. I was an observer of some group music experiences and on most visits I also led singing sessions with all the children of the Eager Beavers room.

There were many different aspects to my role and identity at the centre. I was simultaneously researcher, song writer, singer and (in the eyes of children) educator; therefore constant reflection on my role and interactions was needed. My training and experience as an early childhood educator and music specialist gave me confidence and skills in interacting with the children. In order to involve them as much as possible as equal participants in the research, I adopted a least adult role (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Mandell, 1991). I waited for children to approach me before interacting with them, and generally allowed them to lead interactions.
Maintaining this role was very challenging. Overall however, it proved an immensely valuable research strategy and enabled me to gain a new perspective on interacting with young children. The least adult role (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Mandell, 1991) involves changing the power dynamic in favour of the children. As an early childhood educator I found this at times confronting, so that reflection in and on action (Schön, 1983) was very important. I trained myself to pause and consider my responses to children before reacting. Through this strategy I challenged what I recognised as automatic behaviour developed over many years. During the months of field work I discovered how much power I had held in the past in my relationships with children, and how rewarding it was to relinquish some of this and hand it to the children. This was one of many reciprocal benefits I gained from the research.

**Theories and themes**

The narrative portraits in this collection present pictures of the children using their innate instinct for communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) to synchronise pitch and vocal quality with each other as they interacted to create shared narratives through and with the songs. Features of the musical culture of children and staff at the centre, representing a blend of musical cultures derived from family, community and media (Slobin, 1993) were evident in the children’s styles of engagement with the songs.
Peer interactions and friendships also influenced the children’s engagement with the songs. The portraits show many instances of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005), as the children used knowledge and ideas from their life experiences and collaborated to shape, adapt and extend the songs and to gradually incorporate them into their existing musical cultures.

Several themes dominated the children’s engagement with songs and music making. These were: an interest in social interaction, in loud and fast music, in performance to an audience, in energetic physical movement and in mass market, adult pop-style, recorded music for children. The narrative portraits of the songs portray these themes in the unfolding life cycle of each song.
Illustration 2 Influence of popular media musical cultures

Illustration 3 Interest in fast physical movement to loud, fast music
The lives of the six songs

Little steam train

Little Steam Train

Amanda Niland

Lively \( \text{\textit{J}} = 130 \)

Voice

Little steam train, you’re going out today,
Little steam train, we’ll help you get on your way;
Little steam train, you’re going out today,
Little steam train, we’ll help you get on your way.

First we call the passengers: \([\text{spoken}] \) “All aboard!”
Then we dig the coal: \([\text{spoken}] \) “Dig, dig, dig.”
Then we toot the whistle: “Whoo-oo-oo”;
Then the wheels go around and we’re on our way.

Conception

Every early childhood educator has worked with children who have a passionate interest in trains. My experience of this was the inspiration for Little steam train. Observation of many children’s boundless enthusiasm for playing with trains and their fascination with the real thing, led me to write a song which would allow them to sing about trains as well.

Gestation

I decided that a song about trains should have a focus on physical movement and sound effects. I chose to make the song about a steam train because of its potential for imagination, vocal sounds and movement. Lyrics would need to invite dramatic role play, so that the song could be to some extent a narrative. Children would be able to participate by pretending to be a steam train, or someone who operates a steam train, setting out on a journey.

Once I had decided on potential participation, the next stage of the song writing process was to create lyrics which would invite the movement and sound responses of steam train play. The opening section of the song sets the scene, using first and second person dialogue so that the children can place themselves into the narrative. The second section continues the narrative by describing how a steam train gets under way, suggesting dramatic actions for the children.
When the children use their voices to create steam sounds and their arms to mimic the movement of train wheels, they are responding musically as well as dramatically. They are using the beat of the song and variations in tempo as they enact the narrative of the train’s journey. Vocal sound effects and arm movements can also be used to separate the sections of the song, so that these actions contribute to structuring its musical form.

I chose to use a major key for the melody of Little steam train so that the song conveys a feeling of happy energy around the idea of travelling on a steam train. The melody is fairly challenging for young children to sing with accurate pitch. This is because it has some wide intervals (6ths), which are hard for young children to pitch accurately (Kim, 2000; Sinor, 1985). It nevertheless has appeal as a song for dramatic and physical participation, so that children are actively engaged with the song even if they don’t sing.

Musically the children experience tempo, tone colour and form through participation in Little steam train. The experience of tempo is particularly appropriate in this song, as the link between the train’s speed, the children’s movement and their singing can be explored. The song has two distinct sections, each with different movement and sound responses, so that the children’s active participation reflects its musical form. Tone colour is experienced through the different uses of the voice – in singing, chanting, and making sound effects.
I envisaged that Little steam train could also be embedded in a spoken narrative about train travel, created in collaboration with children. They might choose the colour of the train, its fuel source (steam, diesel or electric), its destination and even its passengers or load. Singing the song would then become the story of the train’s journey. Many children, armed with knowledge gleaned from life experiences as well as from TV and digital media, would be able to contribute with great interest and provide a wealth of relevant information. As the children participate in dramatic enactment of a train journey and use their imaginations to link the song to their life experiences with trains, they might also suggest lyrics for new verses.

Young children’s knowledge about train travel may come from a variety of sources - perhaps actual train travel, playing with train sets or watching favourite DVDs. The DVD and book series Thomas the tank engine is often the source of railway information. The Thomas books have been favourites of many generations of children since first published in 1946 (Awdry), and the TV shows have been produced for nearly 30 years - convincing evidence of a widespread fascination with the romance of trains from a past era – and have been watched by countless millions of children in many countries.

Two and three year old boys in particular often enjoy enacting the train characters in this series. These playful, imaginative social experiences can lead to friendships developing out of shared cultural interests such as
Thomas and his engine friends. Through these situations children may identify with each other, their shared passion for trains signifying membership of a sub culture (Slobin, 1993), which can in turn contribute to the development of those children’s musical cultures.

**Birth**

Dana, the team leader in the Eager Beavers room, taught the children Little steam train before the start of field work, using a CD I had recorded until she got to know the song. On my first field visit Dana and the children proudly sang Little steam train for me. Their enthusiastic familiarity with the song gave me a secret thrill. Their approach to it also introduced me to some key elements of their musical culture, as the children sang loudly and quickly, and performed the accompanying actions with great energy. Several children jumped up and moved to the front of the group to be trains, creating a performer/audience scenario, seen in the illustration below.
Infancy

In early childhood there is an oral tradition akin to folklore around children’s songs. The sharing of songs between educators and children in early childhood communities leads to many variations and adaptations of songs. The early life of Little steam train in the Eager Beavers room showed that this had happened. Dana and the children sang the opening phrase with a slightly different rhythm to what I had written, so that the word “steam” was given a longer time value and thus greater emphasis. My initial reaction was possessive of my original rhythmic structure, but after listening further I realised that their version was quite effective as it gave emphasis to an important word. For the steam sounds which punctuated the beginnings and ends of each section, Dana and the children moved their
arms and used their voices very fast, so that the “choo-choo-choo” sounds were much quicker than in my recorded version.

A few weeks into field work, when I sang this song with the children, four year old Martin said, “What about the big steam train?” After we had sung about a big train, five year old Gemma asked “What about a middle train?” This adaptation of the lyrics is an example of children being active agents in the creation of their own cultures through what Corsaro termed interpretive reproduction (2005). The children made changes and imaginative extensions to the song by applying their own knowledge, life experiences and interests. Martin had focused on the size of the train, and Gemma, demonstrating shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007), took up Martin’s idea and extended it.

These children’s focus on size seemed significant. Early childhood educators are very familiar with young children’s interest in size – for example in relation to things such as toys, age or their own height. Corsaro (2005) argues that this shows a concern with power and control which is often evident in children’s interactions and peer cultures. In their conversation, play and drawings, children regularly convey the concept of greater size equating with superior power or influence. This interest, shown by children in the Eager Beavers group, shaped the life cycle of Little steam train.
Childhood

Singing about different sized trains became an integral part of Little steam train as field work progressed. The sizes gradually extended to include a whole series from tiny to huge. Five year old friends Cory and Ethan, two of the oldest children in the group, along with Gemma, were responsible for suggesting these terms and for deciding to order them in a sequence from smallest to largest. This was a challenging process, and Gemma and Cory became involved in several conversations about which was bigger: giant, huge or enormous. Cory decided that huge was the biggest, and proved it by saying the word with great volume and length: “Hu-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-ge!” as he stretched his arms out and moved from one side of the room to the other. No-one had an effective countering argument! These children led the others in singing quietly for the smallest trains and becoming louder with each subsequent verse (and size increase).
Look around at the colours, look, look around;
Look around at the colours, look, look around;
There are so many colours that can be found;
Look around at the colours, look, look around;
Can you find any red?
Conception

Young children are fascinated by colours, especially when as toddlers they first begin to identify the colours in their surroundings. “Look! Red!” said Amy, aged 23 months, proudly pointing out the colour of her rain coat and her friend’s T shirt during a visit I made to a child care nursery. I felt inspired to give Amy and her friends a way to sing about their important discoveries.

Gestation

Because Look around at the colours was created for one and two year olds, it needed to be musically and linguistically simple, with a focus on inviting children to identify colours. I chose the line “Look around at the colours”, because it suggests a visual action. Both the lyrics and melody of the song are repetitive, therefore easy to remember for children whose language is still developing. Repetition of lyrics and melody also aid children’s memorisation of a song because of the clear structure that repetition creates.

Another value of repetitive lyrics is that they allow children to practise the articulation of words. Songs with few words repeated often are commonly used to assist young children’s developing speech. The rhythm and rhyme structures of a song, combined with melody and repetition, tend to accentuate articulation of words and phrases (Stackhouse, Pascoe & Gardner, 2006). Such songs provide a valuable resource for both speech and language acquisition, in particular the development of receptive language,
as the lyrics reflects the actions children are doing, hence reinforcing meaning.

Look around at the colours has a mostly stepwise melodic structure. Young children can sing more accurately when intervals between notes are fairly narrow (Kim, 2000; Sinor, 1985). The song’s melody has a limited pitch range, to make it singable for children younger than four years (Forrai, 1998; Gordon, 1997; Rutkowski, 1996). Children of this age have a vocal range of about a fifth, approximately between D and A (just above middle C). Melodies within this range are easier for children to sing with accurate pitch, as they lie within the speaking voice range of most children. I chose to set the song in the key of E major so that the melody would be mostly within this range.

The song ends with a question, a device I chose for two reasons. Firstly, a question implies the need for an answer; therefore it encourages children to interact individually within the song. Secondly, questions are often found in call and response traditional songs, which are commonly used by music educators to encourage solo singing (Forrai, 1998). However as this song was intended for children aged three and under, a question was used to invite interaction which did not have to be singing.

**Birth**

I initially sang Look around at the colours with the children of the Eager Beavers group during a sing-along session in the early weeks of field work.
I had asked for requests, and the first was Baa, baa black sheep. Several children suggested singing about different coloured sheep, which we did. The next song requested was Sing a rainbow (Hamilton, 1955).

Noting the children’s interest in singing about colours, I followed by introducing Look around at the colours. The children enthusiastically looked around to find the specified colour right from the first rendition of the song, so that I was quickly overwhelmed with waving hands and calling voices. Some of the older children joined in singing, but the finding of colours was the main focus of participation with the song. When it was time for outdoor play, five year olds Gemma, Ethan and Brian asked if we could keep singing. “I enjoyed those songs” said Gemma. During outdoor play I heard staff member Jeannie humming the beginning of the colours song. Smiling to myself I felt a sneaking sense of pride. “This life cycle is off to a good start,” I thought.

**Infancy**

The second occasion of singing Look around at the colours with the children of the Eager Beavers room was preceded by a request for “The rainbow song” (Sing a rainbow), just as the first occasion had been. After we sang Sing a rainbow Gemma asked for “….the other rainbow song, where you look around for colours”. Many children seemed to recognise the song and several older children joined me in singing. Their enthusiasm was obvious, shown by their attention to me, their smiles, and their very loud shouting out when they found the stated colour. Some found it on their own
clothes or the clothes of their friends. Others found it on nearby furniture or in art works on the walls. While some children found large areas of very obvious colour, others searched for tiny areas. Many were keen to have a turn. A few children sang along, using very loud, shouting voices and chanting rather than singing.

The song also stimulated a conversation about the colours in a rainbow, which was revisited on later occasions when we sang this song. Here is an extract from this conversation:

**Journal, 28 July, 2009**

“What about black?” Ethan called out. I replied that it wasn’t in rainbows, but a few children said they’d seen it. I suggested they look very carefully next time they saw a rainbow.

_Gemma had been listening to this conversation and asked “Is white in rainbows?”_

“Have you seen white?” I asked her.

“I don’t know,” Gemma replied.

I mention this conversation as it was one that recurred and developed over time, stimulated by the colours song. The children’s curiosity about the colours in the rainbow is an example of how a song can trigger imaginative
thinking about life experiences. It also highlights how children can use songs as a medium for communication and meaning-making. Gemma’s thinking was prompted by Ethan’s request, and other children who listened to this conversation stored up Gemma’s and Ethan’s thoughts and revisited them at a later time (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007). Vygotsky’s perspective of the socio-cultural nature of children’s learning is supported by these children’s way of responding to a song about rainbows (Vygotsky, 1978).

The children’s participation in this song threw up two challenges for me to reflect on in relation to both research and pedagogy. The first was the need to find a fair way to allow children to have turns. The second was to encourage singing rather than shouting. I revisited video and audio footage as well as field notes and decided to make a small adaptation to the lyrics of the last line of the song, inserting one child’s name into the question, for example: “Tara can you find something green?”

This small change made a big difference to the children’s participation in the song, which is evident in the following journal entry:

**Journal, 13 August, 2009**

When I got to the question line of the song I tried the new strategy, *singing*: “Gemma, can you find something yellow?” Gemma was one of several children who often looked around for a minute or so and mentally noted a few instances of the colour before deciding on one that was the least obvious. She seemed to want to challenge
herself. So it took her about a minute to find an example of yellow that satisfied her. This was quite a long time for the children to wait, so there was some calling out. I explained that it was Gemma’s turn and asked them to listen for whose name I sang next time.

As the song was sung during many group sing-alongs I observed that my strumming on the guitar gave the children a strong sense of the beat, and several of them jigged (sitting) to the beat. Communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) was clearly evident in the way the children matched their movements to what they could see and hear in my singing and guitar playing. Several children also turned their heads with the beat. This seemed to be a dramatisation of looking around, as the lyrics specified. Gemma was the first one to do this, and several other children near her noticed and did it too.

Gemma’s social leadership in this case led to a new response to this song, which happened many times from then on whenever we sang Look around at the colours (see photo below). She was leading the other children in actively shaping the way that this song was being interpreted as it gradually became incorporated into the centre’s musical culture. This was evidence not only of communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) but also of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005). Gemma was also responsible for the song becoming known as “the other rainbow song, the one where you look around”.

377
One day during the fourth month of field work, our group sing-along began with a request from Gemma for “the rainbow song where you look around”. “Yeah! Yeah!” chimed in her friends Lola and Jessica. It was the timing of this request, ahead of the usual traditional favourites, which seemed to signal that the song had progressed from infancy to childhood. I also observed during this time several instances of children spontaneously singing Look around at the colours as they went about their day.

Towards the end of field work I made a book of Look around at the colours, to encourage the children to interact with this song in a different way (Clark & Moss, 2005). I had hoped to use the children’s art work or...
photos for this, but was unable to gather suitable materials, so instead I used copyright free images from the internet. Each picture contained repeated items in a range of bright colours – balloons, rainbows, butterflies, cars, flowers – so that the children could identify specific colours within each picture, just as we did in the surrounding environment when we sang the song together. I shared this book with a small group of younger children from the Eager Beavers group.

Illustration 6  Extract from book of Look around at the colours

Journal, 16 March, 2010

Molly asked about the book I was holding. “Would you like to hear it?” I asked. All three children said they would, and moved
themselves in that way I’ve so often seen when it’s story time: wriggling to a position where they can see, sitting up a bit straighter, with an expectant look in their eyes. I began to sing the song. We sang the whole book, and each child had a turn to find a colour.

*Molly asked to have the book when we’d finished. She began to sing* from the beginning. She held the book toward us at the end of each page, so that we could point out the colour she had sung in the question line. She sang a shortened version of the song, omitting the *repetition of “Look around at the colours” which is the second* phrase of the song. She sang the song several times for each page, inviting us to find several different colours in each illustration.

Five year old Molly’s responses showed interpretive reproduction occurring as she worked out how she wanted to relate to the group as a leader, and how she wanted to use the song to interact with me, Felix and Danni (Corsaro, 2005). Her easy singing and interacting with the colours song indicated the integration of this song into the centre’s musical culture. Felix’s confident and enthusiastic singing of the colours song also showed that for him it had become a part of his stored knowledge of ‘the songs we sing in the Eager Beavers’.

Observation of the responses of the children in the Eager Beavers group to *Look around at the colours* show the children’s interest in this song to be based on their innate communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen,
2009). They loved the opportunity to interact with a lead singer in responding to a question. By choosing a colour the children and I were creating a shared narrative around colours. When children led the singing with their peers, they were creating shared narratives with their peers.

The question in this song provides the children with an opportunity to take control over the direction of the song. This satisfies their need to explore autonomy, control and power in their peer interactions (Corsaro, 2005). Perhaps too this song is engaging because children are naturally visually observant and at this stage of their lives are building up their understanding of colours – names, shades, tints, gradients, similarities, differences. Therefore the song provides an opportunity to visually explore their surroundings. Many children who sing this song search first for the specified colour on their own person. It may be that for them the song acknowledges part of their identity and their place in the social group of the child care centre as they can point out the colour on their clothes or shoes.
There are millions of stars, in space, ‘cause space is a really big place;
There are millions of stars, in space, ‘cause space is a really big place.
So put on a space suit; jump in a rocket;
Do up your seatbelt; start the countdown;
[speaking] 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0... blast off!
Then we’re zooming along, in space, ‘cause space is a really big place.
Conception

The opportunity to write a song for or with the children of the Eager Beavers group was something I hoped would arise during field work. In the early weeks I listened and observed to find topics of interest to the children. One morning as I browsed the photos and documentation displayed for families from the previous day I noticed a photo of Ethan, Cory, Jessica and several of the oldest children playing in a very large low box and pretending it was a space rocket. Apparently this had been a fascinating play scenario for these children, and educators Dana and Jeannie were keen to follow up their interest in space. Observation of the enthusiasm of many of the older children over my next few visits led to the decision to create a song about space.

The drawings below reveal how much information about space the children had gleaned from sources such as books, TV or conversations with adults, and how they had used their imaginations to pose ideas or theories about space. The themes of interest which were evident in the children’s play, conversations and drawings over several weeks were clear examples of their use of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005) as they shaped their understandings about space. Space seemed like an excellent topic to create a song around.
Illustrations 7-9 Children’s ideas about space
Gestation

Over the next few field visits I gathered many ideas for a space song from observing children’s play, drawings and conversations. Strong themes which emerged were: the size of space, the special equipment an astronaut needs, travel by rocket, and the existence of stars and planets.

Because the children showed such imaginative fascination with the seemingly super-natural aspects of space, I used expressive language at the start of the song to engage their interest. Revisiting field notes I was reminded that my first thoughts about creating a song around the play interests of the Eager Beavers had arisen from observations of children’s interest in numbers and size. This led to the incorporation of mathematical language and a focus on quantity and size at the start of the space song. Hence the first line: “There are millions of stars...in space, ‘cause space is a really big place”. The line “space is a really big place” is repeated often in the song. The internal rhyme in this line is one of its strengths, as children seemed to find it easy to remember and musically satisfying to sing or say.

The melody of the space song is major in tonality and can be sung in the keys of either C or D to accommodate young children’s vocal range. A major key was chosen as it helps to create a feeling of wonder at the magic of space, and excitement at the thought of space travel.

The verse has a ternary melodic structure and involves repetition. The bridge section, which builds a narrative of dramatised space travel and leads
to a chanted countdown, differs both rhythmically and melodically from the verse. It has repeated words on the same notes, and climbs stepwise, to create dramatic tension in anticipation of an imaginary lift off. After the chanted countdown the song concludes with a repetition of the melody of the verse with lyrics which bring the narrative to a close.

In Space is a really big place there is less scope for varied musical responses than in the most of the other songs in this collection. However the children’s dramatic responses in the bridge section, which build a narrative about journeying to space, also contribute to structuring the musical form of the song, by creating bars of silence (for the actions) between each musical phrase.

![Illustration 10 Cory, Ethan, Phil and Brian build a space ship](image_url)
It was a cool day, cloudy with intermittent rain, so the children stayed indoors. Ethan suggested to Cory that they build a rocket. They moved over to the block area and got started. This play lasted quite a long time. Phil and Kai joined them to ‘travel’ to space.

Dana noticed this play and got out a parachute at group time, which she pretended was a space ship. The children all sat on it and Dana led them in a very noisy drama experience of a voyage to outer space. She asked lots of open ended questions so that the children could guide the journey, which several of the oldest children did with great enthusiasm. “Look I can see Mars! I can see Jupiter! I can see aliens!” The space conversations continued through lunch and excited interest in space was so palpable in the room that it seemed like a very good day to introduce a new song about space.

After lunch I led a sing-along as usual. Following a few requests for familiar favourites began to sing the new space song. Because it is quite repetitive several of the older children, such as Cory, Jessica and Gemma, memorised it quickly and joined in for the second half of the opening verse. I sang the first verse I had written and then asked the children what else we might see in space as well as stars. “Planets,” said Ethan. “Moons,” said Gemma. So the second verse became “There are planets and moons....in space, ‘cause space is a
After the two verses I then sang the final section of the song, which allows the children to dramatise space travel. There was lots of very enthusiastic participation in this, especially the countdown and blast off, which became very loud.

Infancy

The second time I led the children in singing Space is a really big place, quite a few of the oldest children seemed to remember the song and joined in singing from the beginning. The line “space is a really big place” was easy for many children to remember, so their singing was most confident in this part of the song.

The older children were aware that I had written many of the songs we sang, and a few of them asked me where I “got” my songs. “She made them up,” was Gemma’s answer on one occasion. A few of the children, such as Ethan, developed an interest in making up songs too.

Journal, 18 August, 2009

On my arrival today, the children were all seated around Dana for a group time. Ethan was standing next to her, holding the karaoke microphone which lives in the Eager Beavers room. “Ethan has made up a space song,” Dana told me, and taking the microphone she announced “Here is Ethan, singing his space song!” in a dramatic voice. All the children clapped and some staff members cheered, as did Cory. The audio recorder caught the song, although
the recording wasn’t very clear, due to background noise and the distance between the recorder and Ethan. However some of his lyrics were as follows:

“There was an astronaut.

He went to heaps of planets.

He didn’t just go to planets; he went to the sun and the moon.

He went up and down, up and down.

And that rocket ship went to Jupiter.

.....stars like diamonds in the sky...”

Ethan was chanting rather than singing, but there was a sense of beat and 4/4 metre in most of his rendition. I was interested to hear the line about stars like diamonds in the sky, an example of Ethan using snippets and ideas from a known song in creating his spontaneous song (Barrett, 2006).

Ethan looked at me and smiled shyly as he sang, seemingly focused on sharing his song with me. This may have been related to the fact that I was recording him, but I think it also related to his view of me as a singing person. He had already grasped that I had written some of the songs I shared with the children, and knew which ones were my songs. Dana told me later that this was the first time Ethan had made up a song and come to tell her about it. When the children moved away from group time to play, I played the recording of his space song back to Ethan. He smiled broadly on hearing his voice.
Dana asked if anyone else wanted to sing a space song. Molly sang a snippet, very quietly: “The space ship went up very high”.

Madeleine also had a turn: “There was petrol in the rocket”.

At group sing-along that day, after the usual song requests I asked the children if they’d like to sing the space song. “Yes” said Gemma emphatically. Cory and Ethan stopped wrestling on the sidelines when they heard the word space and sat up facing me. I began to strum my guitar and sing the song. Gemma joined in really strongly. She remembered the song very well. Two verses were sung (“millions of stars....”, “planets and moons....”) and the children had more suggestions about what else might be in space. “The sun” called Madeleine, “it’s really hot”. So a third verse was created (“there’s a very hot sun, in space...”). This was followed by the dramatisation section. The countdown was loud, as previously, and several children such as four year old friends Katey, Molly and Lana, stood up and pretended to float in space.

**Childhood**

During September, 2009 I had several weeks away from field work. In my absence, the children’s interest in space was further explored through play and extended by the staff. This culminated in a space night, in which parents viewed the children’s art work related to space and some space games were played. I was sorry to miss out on being part of this.
When field work recommenced the children’s play interests had changed and new projects were evident in the Eager Beavers room. Some of these interests were related to the changing weather, as it was now spring. I led a sing-along on my first day back, and the children gathered around my guitar with enthusiasm and argued with each other about which songs to choose. We sang requests at first, which included several of my songs, but not Space is a really big place. So after five or six songs I started singing it. Gemma, Ethan and Kai joined in with great enthusiasm and several other children chimed in with the lines “space is a really big place”. Just as on previous occasions, most children shouted the countdown and energetically dramatised donning a space suit and doing up their seatbelts in their rockets. There was a feeling of familiarity in the way the children participated in the actions and snippets of singing.

I didn’t suggest singing the space song over the next few weeks, but waited to see if anyone would request it. Eventually Kai, one of the older boys, did. Cory looked up with interest from a toy he was holding and began to sing with me. Ethan, Lola and several of the oldest children also sang along confidently. After we sang two verses Kai called out “What about rocket ships?”

“What else is in space that we could sing about, as well as rocket ships?” I asked, thinking a few more words were needed to fit with the melody and rhythm of the verse structure of the song. Kai thought for a moment and
said “Astronauts. They go in the rocket ships”. So we sang ‘There are astronauts in rocket ships, in space”.

I asked the children what else is in space, and Cory said “You know, those...thingies...”. Kai and I suggested a few things and finally discovered that Cory was thinking of satellites. He said “There are hundreds of satellites”. So this line became the start of another verse. Although we didn’t sing Space is a really big place very often for the remainder of field visits, the children who had been most involved in space investigations retained a keen interest in the song.

**Journal, 17 November, 2009**

Ethan saw me using my voice recorder, asked if he could sing his own songs for a DVD onto my ‘space recorder’. I explained that I could make CDs to listen to and asked if he’d like one of those. I also told him I’d made a CD of me singing my songs for each of the children to get at the graduation. “To take home?” he asked. “Yes” I replied. “What songs are on it?” Ethan asked. I began to list them and he interrupted to ask if the space song would be on it. “That’s my favourite” he said.

Space is a really big place didn’t develop beyond ‘early childhood’ during my field work. However it did develop beyond infancy in relation to the responses of certain children. It was also an important song for Ethan as it seems to have inspired him to create his own songs. He went on to create
another special song after his space song, which captured the interest of several of his friends, his dump truck song.
If a dinosaur came to your house, what would you do? If a dinosaur came to your house, what would you do?

You could run; you could hide; under the bed; [children can devise alternate lyrics here]

Be very quiet….be very still…and listen….. [spoken] oh-oh!

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

**Final verse:** [Repeat up to hiding place]

[spoken] Or you could say “A dinosaur couldn’t come to our house, because there are no dinosaurs any more, they’re extinct!”
Conception

The inspiration to create If a dinosaur came to your house arose from a song about a monster learnt from an early childhood colleague. It was a humorous song, in which each verse told of a different room in a house where a monster was located. The children could choose what the monster would eat in each room: for example the monster in the kitchen might eat the pots and pans. This song elicited enthusiastic participation and much laughter whenever it was sung with children.

I decided to create a song with a similar scenario, but about dinosaurs instead of monsters. In order to give the children some agency in the imagined situations the narrative in the dinosaur song would centre around the children’s actions towards the dinosaur rather than on what the dinosaur might do.

Young children’s interest in dinosaurs has some similarities to their interest in space. These two topics excite their imaginations as they are completely outside their life experiences. Both also encompass dimensions of great size and distance. Space is vast beyond our comprehension, and dinosaurs lived long ago, in a past far beyond young children’s understandings of time. Many dinosaurs too were much larger in size than any creatures in existence now. The creation of a song about dinosaurs was aimed at tapping in to similar motivations in children’s interests. Therefore both songs provide opportunities for children to explore huge sizes and distances, partly through narrative.
Gestation

I chose to use a question at the opening of the song, to stimulate children’s imaginative role play. There are many examples of traditional children’s songs and rhymes which focus on a question, such as Frère Jacques. The question created for the dinosaur song allows the children to consider a problem and devise a solution. The lyrics allow the children to choose where to hide from the dinosaur, and the song ends by affirming that there are no dinosaurs in our world any more. This is important as the children can explore potential danger in the song, but can conclude it with a feeling of control and safety.

The melody is written in the key of F minor. As it ranges between middle C and A flat (a range of a sixth), the song is mostly located around the bottom of young children’s natural speaking voice range. Both tonality and pitch range were selected to create an atmosphere of suspense. For this reason also a slow tempo is used, to mimic the heavy footsteps of a very large dinosaur.

The rhythm of this song was created to follow the natural accent patterns of the lyrics, but also to further highlight key words through rhythmic stresses and time values. For example in the opening bars longer notes are used for lyric phrase “your house” than for the preceding words. This means that “your house” is stressed by the feeling of the musical phrase slowing down. These words are important for children imagining the scenario of a dinosaur coming to their house.
In If a dinosaur came to your house the children’s actions in responding to beat and tempo serve to build a narrative. For example repetitions of the phrase “Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!” form a bridge between verses of the song, contributing to both its musical form and its narrative. The melodic structure of this phrase, a falling melodic minor scale passage, was written to create a feeling of suspense to enhance the dramatic mood of the song. This section can be sung as a crescendo to suggest the dinosaur coming closer.

Provision is made for the children’s ideas (where to hide), so that they can participate in shaping the song’s narrative. Hiding is a universally popular young children’s game, linking this song with common play interests. Having to decide where to hide encourages children to formulate a mental picture of their house in order to find potential hiding spaces. Therefore this song allows the children to make meaningful connections with their own lives (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Office of Child Care NSW, 2006).

At the end of each verse there are short phrases, each with a fermata, so that the rhythm is interrupted, creating a feeling of anticipation. These are followed by a spoken exclamation (“oh oh!”), which provides a vocal contrast, and links via a musical bridge to the next rendition of the song, and the continuation of the narrative.
At the end of the song, after an indeterminate number of renditions depending on the children’s interest, there is provision for a spoken improvised statement about the fact that there are no dinosaurs in the world any more. Young children’s emergent understanding of the difference between pretence and reality (Frahsek, Mack, Mack, Pfalz-Blezinger & Knopf, 2010) is used to provide a comic resolution of tension.

**Birth**

One day when an Eager Beavers staff member put on a CD for movement, the most popular track with many of the children was a dinosaur dance. They roared, growled, stamped their feet and made claws as they pretended to be dinosaurs with great interest and enthusiasm. Many of the children interacted with each other in mini dramatic play scenarios: “I’m tyrannosaurus, Roar!!” exclaimed Cory. “Stegosaurus!” yelled Phil. The introduction of a dinosaur song seemed appropriate, and an opportunity to do so arose the following week:

**Journal, 6 October, 2009**

“Can you make dinosaur footsteps on your knees like this?” I said, demonstrating heavy, slow movements with my arms on my knees. *They all joined in and I began to sing: “Stomp, stomp, stomp, stomp!”* A few of the older children such as Jessica, Gemma, Cory, Ethan, joined in with these words. *Then I began the verse: “If a dinosaur came to your house, what would you do?”* I could see many pairs of eyes widen and watch my face intently, wondering
what was coming next. As I continued to sing, most children followed my dramatic actions (pretending to hide their face behind their hands, putting a hand to an ear to listen) and I observed that the short phrases and fermata (also effectively pausing the action of the narrative) kept their rapt attention on me. For the first two renditions I suggested the hiding places, but in the third rendition Brian called out “in the garage under the car!” and after that I was inundated with shouted suggestions.

We were called for lunch after four renditions. One of the staff sat down in front of the children to lead a transition rhyme, sending them off in pairs to wash their hands for lunch. A group of children requested ‘the witch song’, a favourite rhyme, in which the children are magically transformed into imaginary beings by a witch. The staff member carried on the dinosaur interest by turning many of the children, especially boys, into dinosaurs.

If a dinosaur came to your house is similar to Look around at the colours in that both encourage the children to participate interactively with me or whoever is the singing leader. The interactions involved can be viewed as forms of communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). In the colours song the interaction is communicative (finding the answer to a question) but not specifically musical. The interaction involved in the dinosaur song is more musical, as it involves the children synchronising
beat and vocal quality (dynamics) with each other to dramatise the narrative as well as in contributing ideas for lyric variations to develop the narrative.

Infancy

It was a few weeks before this song was sung a second time with the children of the Eager Beavers. During this period visiting pre-service teaching students had been working with some children who showed an interest in dinosaurs, and dinosaurs featured quite often in the dramatic play of many of the older boys in. One day in late October Cory, Ethan, Martin and Jason were digging for dinosaurs in the sand pit. They discussed which ones they were looking for, and tried to outdo each other in comparing the sizes of their imagined dinosaurs. This was yet another example of the interest in power and control mentioned by Corsaro (2005) which is so often evident in children’s social play.

Journal, 13 October, 2009

Because of this dinosaur play I launched into ‘If a dinosaur came to your house’ at group time before lunch that day. “Let’s hear some dinosaur footsteps,” I said to the children and began to pat my knees alternately while singing “Stomp, stomp…..” slowly, strongly and dramatically. The whole group joined in enthusiastically, Cory and Ethan possibly a little too enthusiastically. Well, a little too loudly anyway. I noticed that all the children were synchronising the pulse of their knee tapping with my singing and my actions. The fact that this was a slow beat didn’t seem to matter.
The older boys were dominant in calling out places to hide. Someone suggested hiding in the garage, possibly remembering *Brian’s suggestion from several weeks ago*. Other suggestions included hiding under the bed, behind the door and under the table.

I whispered the lines “Be very quiet.... Be very still..... and listen.....” using dramatic facial expressions and long pauses. This really captured the children’s attention. Many of them vied after the final pause to be the first to say “oh-oh!” This was shouted a bit louder each verse. The feelings of excitement and anticipation were palpable. I was aware of wide eyes on me, as the children engaged with the narrative of the song.

**Childhood**

After October we didn’t sing the dinosaur song again until the following year. On the first field visit in 2010 Tara requested “the dinosaur song” during group sing-along.

**Journal, 2 March, 2010**

As I began to sing the children who had been Eager Beavers last year immediately began to pat their knees and join in singing “Stomp, stomp...”. Many of the younger children imitated them. Before we got to “You can hide” Jack (aged three) called out “Hide! Hide!” I was fascinated that he had thought of this without knowing the song. It confirmed for me the strength of the logic of the
narrative I had created. I gave him a special smile as I sang “You can hide”, to acknowledge his suggestion.

The children had many ideas about places to hide from the dinosaur – in a cupboard, under the leaves, in the snow (!), under the sea, in the bathroom, under the bed, behind the trees. Some of these ideas were similar to those children had heard or suggested on previous occasions. However some were completely new.

Many of the suggestions, and much of the most rapt attention came from the new Eager Beavers. Charlotte was particularly fascinated. During the second verse of the song she ran over the nearby toy shelf and brought me back a toy dinosaur. When I ended the song after about ten verses, as it was time to move away from group time she said, “I want to sing more dinosaur song”.

On my next visit Charlie, one of the younger boys, asked for the dinosaur song during group sing-along. Straightaway a few children began patting their knees and chanting “Stomp, stomp...”. I joined in and began the song. The whole group watched me intently and participated in the actions energetically, synchronising the pulse of their voices and hands for the “Stomp, stomp..” section. Quite a few children sang or chanted along with most of the words. I sang slowly, partly because this enhances the drama of the song, but also to allow the children space to lead the song. I noticed that many of them seemed to remember the narrative sequence.
As I sang, “You could run, you could hide” about eight hands went up. The first suggested hiding place was “under the bed”. Marian had a variation on this idea – “under the covers”. Phil suggested the cupboard. Then three or four of the youngest children chose under the bed as their hiding place. Many of these children put up their hands to contribute an idea but in fact hadn’t thought of one. They just seemed keen to be part of the experience. In each case they hesitated before making a suggestion we had already sung.

I made a point of honouring each child’s choice even if it was a repetition of another’s. Many children seem to need experience of contributing ideas in group sessions to gain confidence before they gain the confidence to extend their imaginative thinking. They can be seen as examples of communicative musicality (Malloch and Trevarthen, 2009), as the children are focused on communicating and making a shared narrative around a song.

**Journal, 9 March, 2010**

After we had sung about hiding under the bed quite a few times Molly suggested hiding “up in a cloud”. That gave me a really good idea for ending the song. “Do you think the dinosaur will find us up there?” I asked the children.

“No,” many of them replied.

“How will we get there?” I asked.
“We need wings,” said Charlotte. So we pretended to use wings (our arms) to get to a cloud, and that was the end of the song. I didn’t think fast enough to improvise a melodic narrative for this, I just used speech: “So the dinosaur couldn’t find us anywhere.”

This was a special moment. I have always found it exciting when children come up with a new idea in a song which no other child has ever suggested before. It is also interesting when one child’s idea inspires imaginative thinking by the rest of the group and this leads the interpretation of the song in a completely new direction. Molly’s idea was a wonderful example of this. It came at around the time when some children were getting bored with repeating the same song so many times and were rolling around the floor and no longer participating, so her suggestion provided a way to end to song, but it seemed a shame not to build on it more. I hoped that on a future occasion it might lead to some further creative approaches to the dinosaur song.

There was tension in this moment between my roles as song writer, researcher and early childhood educator. The latter recognised that many children were no longer engaged with the song and that their restlessness needed to be understood and dealt with sensitively. However the former would have liked to explore this new direction in the narrative.

The familiarity with this song over time experienced by the longer term Eager Beavers, combined with the fresh interest in dinosaurs shown by the
new Eager Beavers, contributed to moving this song to the next stage of its life cycle. In 2010 the children really began to play with the song in creative ways, as is typical of childhood. They actively created their own narratives about dinosaurs using interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005) and worked together with me to create a shared musical narrative (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009).
The little pigs’ chorus

Hooray! Hooray! We’re glad to say
That the big bad wolf has gone away.
Hooray! Hooray! We’re glad to say
That the big bad wolf has gone away.
He huffed and he puffed but we wouldn’t let him in;
Not by the hairs of our chinny-chin-chins.
Hooray! Hooray! We’re glad to say
That the big bad wolf has gone away.
Conception

The little pigs’ chorus was written during field work as the finale for a drama production that was developed as part of the graduation celebrations for the children in the Eager Beavers group who were going to school the next year. The play was created by Dana, in consultation with some of the children. The inspiration for the play arose from a visit to a performance of The gingerbread man given by a kindergarten class (5 to 6 year olds) at the neighbouring public school. The older children were especially captivated by this performance and Dana was keen to follow up their interest.

After discussion with the children about the stories they knew she decided to create a dramatic version of The three little pigs. Dana wrote a simple narrative script, with spaces for the children to insert familiar dialogue and found costumes for the pigs, the wolf and a farmer (he/she escorts the wolf away at the end of the story).

The children took turns to perform the play, so that everyone who wanted a role had an opportunity to perform. A number of performances by different groups of children were recorded and a DVD made for families. This meant that those not selected to perform at the centre’s graduation night would still be included. I suggested writing a song to sing at the end of the play, so that everyone could join in at the finale. Hence the creation of The little pigs’ chorus.
Gestation

The little pigs’ chorus, is similar in some ways in its narrative focus to If a dinosaur came to your house. In these two songs the lyrics portray the singers as taking control against an opponent and actively solving a problem. The lyrics of both songs provide opportunities for the children to take an active role in the situations described. In the dinosaur song this involves the creation of lyrics which shape the song’s narrative. In The little pigs’ chorus the lyrics were not written with any thought of adaptations, they simply convey the success of the little pigs in overcoming the threat from the Big Bad Wolf, so that the children can identify with the triumph of small over big (in terms of size and strength).

The little pigs’ chorus uses a 4/4 time signature, appropriate for a lively dance of victory such as the triumphant little pigs might do. Lyrics suggested by Ethan were used at the start of the song, but the rhythm was varied, so that his words were extended upon. First person was used to convey the pig’s emotions, and to make the song a continuation of the narrative of Dana’s play. To strengthen this further, words from the traditional story which are so familiar to many children were used. The lyrics represent the little pigs, victorious over the wolf, reflecting proudly on what had happened and on their actions.

The rhythmic structure means that the accented words on the first beat of each bar are mostly key words in conveying the narrative. The melody is major in tonality and begins with a strong feeling of a perfect cadence (a
harmonic pattern often used at the end of a musical phrase), stylistically similar to a fanfare. This gives the song a celebratory feeling to match the lyrics. This accompanies the words “hooray, hooray”.

Birth

I sang the song with the children for the first time, then gave Dana a CD of me singing, so that she could use it for rehearsals in my absence. From its introduction the children showed strong interest *The little pigs’ chorus*. This was most likely influenced by the general excitement around preparations for the graduation celebrations which were dominating the focus of staff and children at the time.

Infancy

Once *The little pigs’ chorus* was composed and introduced to the children it was sung almost every day until the graduation celebration, a period of about five weeks. During group singing the week after the song was first introduced Lola requested “the pig song”. Even though we had already sung it several times that morning during rehearsals of the play, most of the children, including the entire graduating group, sang the song with familiarity and enthusiasm.

Because most of the children were so confident with *The little pigs’ chorus* I asked them if anyone would like to come to the front of the group to sing the song. Performer/audience scenarios were often part of the children’s spontaneous play, so I thought it could be used during group sing-along.
More than half of the children wanted a turn to sing out the front. The seated children spontaneously applauded each performance, a common response during many group times in the Eager Beavers room, especially at this time when a public performance was being prepared.

**Childhood**

Very often during field work children would notice me writing in my notebook and ask if they could write in it too. My field notes are interspersed with many drawings, signed by the artist, and early attempts at writing. Many conversations occurred while we were taking turns with my journals, such as the one below:

**Journal, 24th November, 2009**

One day I was running out of pages in my current notebook. So when two of the older girls wanted to write in it I asked them to make sure they left me a few pages. “I need to write things about your singing and your favourite songs,” I said to them.

“My favourite song is..... [pausing to think]...the piggy song,” said Lola, and proceeded to sing the song while she drew some flowers in my note book. It was a perfect rendition, except that the first line was not repeated.
Two weeks after *The little pigs’ chorus* was introduced to the children, Dana decided that she would like to start making video recordings of performances of The three little pigs. So when it was time for outdoor play, a small group stayed in to perform the play, which I offered to video.
The group of actors in the first video performance knew the lyrics very well. The video recordings of *The little pigs’ chorus* recorded on this day and subsequently show many instances of the children playing with the song. For example, Alison, who played the wolf in this rendition, always tapped her chin with the beat when singing “not by the hairs of our chinny chin chin”. After the song finished on one recording one voice could be heard singing a sort of echo of the last three notes of the song – “has gone away” – in a humorous voice.

After lunch on the day the video recordings of The three little pigs were made, I sat down with my guitar to sing with the children. *The little pigs’* chorus was amongst the songs requested by the children. Even though many of them had sung it quite a few times already that day, the enthusiastic participation indicated that their interest was strengthened through repetition (Siebenaler, 1999).

**Journal, 28 November**

*At lunch today, after we’d videoed the play several times, Lola began to sing the song while helping herself to food. She seemed to be unconscious of this (her focus was on lunch not on the song) until a few other children joined in and together they sang the whole song. Lola looked at me as I happened to be walking close by, bringing drinks to her table and said “You must be proud that we’re singing your song.”*

“I certainly am” I replied.
Because *The little pigs’ chorus* was created for (and with) the children in the Eager Beavers group, its life cycle reflects many aspects of the musical culture of the Eager Beavers. Evidence of the four key elements of this culture identified and in my research are explored below.

**Loudness**

The children often shouted this song. The CD I had recorded gave a model of quieter singing, but because the song was sung at the end of the play, the children, both actors and audience, were often excited. Often a few of the audience members at the front would jump up to join in with the dancing of the actors while singing the song. The lyrics, especially ‘hooray’, possibly also encourage a loud, excited, jubilant approach to singing.

**Performance to an audience**

This was a key part of the life cycle of this song as it was composed to be part of a performance piece for a special occasion. Musical performance often occurred in the Eager Beavers, room both in structured group times and in spontaneous play. During *The little pig’s chorus*, just as I had observed on other occasions, the children had a flexible view of the roles of performer and audience member, and often moved between the two.
Illustration 13 Spontaneous performer/ audience musical play

*Communicative musicality*

Whenever this song was sung the children mostly synchronised their sing/speaking pitch and their tempo with the strong singers, who became informal leaders of the singing. Gemma and Jessica often unconsciously took on this role. The dancing the children did, which was mostly just jumping, was not accurately synchronous with the beat of the song. It was hard to jump quite fast enough. However the children did mostly synchronise their jumping with each other.

*Musical commodities and popular culture*

The children’s engagement with *The little pigs’ chorus* showed the influence of mass market children’s music commodities: in particular the style of dancing of many of the children was similar to the dancing on DVDs of music produced for children such as the Wiggles and Hi 5. The
children’s movement responses also showed similarities to dancing seen on pop music TV and DVDs.
I’m a drummer in a band

I’m a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3;
I’m a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3;
I’m a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3;
I’m a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3.

I play my drums very loudly, [alternatives: softly, fast, slowly]
I play my drums very loudly,
I play my drums very loudly,
And then I stop!
Conception

Young children love to create sound using movement and energy (Young, 2003), so drumming is especially engaging for them. There are many drumming songs in the early childhood music education repertoire, often adaptations of traditional songs. My intention in writing a drumming song was to provide children with possibilities for both musical and pretend play responses.

Gestation

First person was used in the song’s lyrics, to encourage children to identify with the song and to link imagination with life experiences. Although the lyrics of this song do not create a narrative in the same way as other songs which involve dramatic role play, they still provide a possibility for children to imagine a scenario around being a drummer in a band, so that the song could become embedded in a wider narrative play frame (Bateson, 2006).

*I’m a drummer in a band* was not intended to be sung accompanied by a whole group of children playing drums, as the sound of many drums would make singing inaudible and listening to rhythm or tone colour impossible. The intention was for one child, or maybe two, to be the drummers, while the rest of the group could play imaginary drums on their knees. Therefore this song features some children more prominently but includes all children in singing and physical participation.
While undertaking this research I became aware that when writing a song my thinking moves between several different perspectives. Sometimes I think as a music educator, considering what musical concepts a song might highlight, or how I can make a song singable for very young voices. At other times I think as an early childhood educator, considering how a song might relate to children’s play interests, how they might play with elements of the song, and what meaning children may take from the song. I also think as a musician/song writer, considering which tonality, melodic structure or rhythm seem most aesthetically satisfying to me.

Songwriting is thus a process of creative integration of ideas influenced by these diverse perspectives. The relative dominance of each perspective varies depending on the song. For *I’m a drummer in a band* music education was the strongest influence on the music of the song, because the motivation to write it arose from music education curriculum planning.

The creation of this song began with consideration of what potential for participation the song might provide. I decided to create a song with alternate musical phrases of singing and drumming. From a music education perspective this would allow the children to focus on a specific rhythm pattern in their drumming. It would also allow for either solo drumming or for everyone to join in, perhaps using body percussion actions. An alternate singing/drumming structure would also enable children to grasp the form of the song through changes in response and tone colour between singing and speaking, and between singing and drumming.
The lyrics would need to be simple and repetitive, making them easy to learn. This would encourage the children to focus on drumming, which was likely to be the most engaging aspect of the song (Young, 2003).

Integration of the diverse perspectives of music educator, early childhood educator and song writer shaped the lyrics of *I'm a drummer in a band*. My aim was to engage the children with drumming in a playful, imaginative way. To achieve this, lyrics that went beyond simple description of the action of drumming would be needed, so that children would be encouraged to take on a role within the song.

Although in the first section of the song the line, “I’m a drummer in a band”, is repeated four times, the drumming pattern between each singing phrase can potentially change, allowing the drummer(s) to create their own rhythm patterns. In the second section there is opportunity for some lyrical variations. This allows children to select their style of drumming: loud, soft, fast, slow, or gradations of these. The decision to include these choices was influenced by a music education perspective – to allow the children to explore the musical elements of tempo and dynamics and possibly tone colour.

The lyrics in section two end with “and then I stop!” This choice of ending was influenced by a music educator’s perspective. Repertoire for young children often includes songs which contrast between sound and silence, movement and stillness and such songs are greatly enjoyed by young
children (Feierabend, 1996). Games of moving and stopping are very engaging for young children, therefore from an early childhood perspective, the song would provide potential for play. From a music education perspective the contrast provided heightens children’s listening skills and aural awareness, both important foundational musical skills (Bridges, 1994).

The song’s melody is based on 12 bar blues structure. The melody itself is minor in tonality, built on the tonic, subdominant seventh and dominant seventh chords of E minor. It is repetitive, just as the lyrics are repetitive. The pitch range of the melody is a minor sixth, from B to G, at the lower end of the vocal range of most three to five year olds. The blues style was chosen as it represents a style often used in rock songs, performed by bands with drummers. The melody has a very narrow pitch range, which is potentially easy to sing with accurate pitch.

The version of the song I recorded on CD for field work contained no drumming sounds, just my voice. In section one a speaking voice was used, saying “One, two, three” for the drumming phrases, conveying a rhythm pattern of three crotchet beats. This was done to give the children the opportunity to tap in time with a speech rhythm. This idea arose from music education pedagogy. Speech is naturally rhythmic, so for young children, chanted words, and particularly numbers, can provide a model of a simple rhythm pattern (Forrai, 1998). Once the children are confident in playing this, they can be encouraged either to improvise other spoken patterns to
accompany the song, in the style of jazz scatting (improvisation on neutral syllables) or to play the number patterns or other improvised patterns with no spoken accompaniment. The use of “one, two, three” gives an educational starting point, which was intended to be useful for Dana and the children in the Eager Beavers group. The use of numbers also gave children newly introduced to this song a chance to participate while still becoming familiar with the rest of the song.

**Birth**

Dana introduced *I’m a drummer in the band* to the children. She told me that she chose it because she enjoyed playing percussion instruments with the children. She also thought the children would like this song because of its instrumental focus. On the first field visit two of the graduating group of children, Gemma and Jessica, told me “We heard you on the CD before you came.” So when I met the children for the first time my name, voice and several songs were already known to the children in the Eager Beavers group.

**Infancy**

I heard the Eager Beavers sing this song on my first field visit. No instruments were used on this occasion; instead the children played imaginary drums on their legs. The children’s singing/chanting showed great enthusiasm and the lyrics and song structure were obviously familiar to them.
Not everyone sang but they all tapped their knees or thighs with great energy and synchronised their actions with their voices for “one, two, three”. Some children synchronised the beat of their tapping with Dana and the children around them, but not all did this. Most children shouted the numbers loudly and excitedly. Dana led the children in singing a loud verse, then a soft verse, then a loud verse of the song.

Illustration 14 The drumming song during a group sing-along

I first led the singing of *I'm a drummer in a band* a few weeks later. I played a djembe, a small African drum, while the children played imaginary drums on their knees. After being shown how to play the djembe, several children had individual turns. They were offered a choice between playing loudly or softly and all chose loudly. So that more children could participate in drumming, I also allowed pairs of children to play the djembe together. I observed that the pairs who did this made eye contact with each other and watched each other’s hands, intentionally seeking to synchronise the pulse
of their playing. Communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) was clear in the way the djembe was used with the song, especially when pairs of children shared the drumming.

Fast tempo and loud dynamics were particularly prevalent in the life cycle of this song. This could relate to the fact that it was introduced to the children by Dana, but it could also relate to the drumming focus of the lyrics and actions of the song, which invite speed, loudness and physical energy.

**Childhood**

The spontaneous play of a small group of girls with my djembe, observed one day after a few weeks of field work, seemed to indicate that this song had progressed to the childhood stage of its life cycle. Four year old Tara led most of the interaction, playing the role of a teacher. Four year old Rochelle hovered impatiently, wanting control of the drum and when Tara finally relinquished it and moved away, Rochelle moved to the adult chair nearby and proceeded to play the role of teacher, communicating at times with an imaginary child and at other times with Gemma and Phil.

Rochelle and Tara both used snippets of *I'm a drummer in a band* and their singing showed that they knew the song quite well. All the children kept the beat accurately when singing/chanting and synchronised the pulse of their singing and tapping with each other.
The next time we sang *I’m a drummer in a band* during group time, the djembe was passed around for pairs of children to take turns in playing. The children synchronised the pulse of their singing and of their taps to “one, two, three” with each other (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). As I had observed before, pairs and small groups of particular friends watched each other very carefully and made eye contact during the song. When this happened a leader and followers relationship would emerge for the rest of the song. It was not always possible to identify which child was taking which role, and it often seemed that the roles changed from time to time through some unspoken instantaneous communication.

On this day, as on previous occasions, the loud verses were extremely loud. From the perspective of a music educator the harsh shouting which many children did led to an instinctive desire to curb and reshape their responses. However from the perspective of a researcher the loudness had cultural significance, as it had been shown over time to be a key element of the musical culture of the Eager Beavers group.

I used my role as leader of the singing to begin a quiet verse. Most of the children imitated the whispering and gentle tapping. They hunched forward and unconsciously slowed down their movements and singing slightly. They seemed to enjoy the contrast in dynamics.
I’m a drummer in a band was sung spontaneously several times during outdoor play time when I sat with my djembe. On some occasions I began the song and children joined in, while on others children initiated the song. During the interactions in which I began to sing while a child was playing the djembe I noticed that some children were not listening to my singing or attempting to synchronise their drumming with it.

The children and I took many photos of individual children playing the djembe during free play times. Towards the end of field work I used these to make a book of I’m a drummer in a band. It consisted of one line of the song and one photo on each page, printed single-sided, so that a reader/singer would need to turn the page at the end of each line of the

Illustration 14 Lola and Madeleine synchronise pulse
song. Some photos from group sing-alongs of this song were used, as well as photos of individual children playing the djembe.

Illustrations 15-17 Musical play with the djembe
Reflections: Songs for, with or by children?

The songs children sing can be divided into three distinct categories: songs to be sung for children, with children or by children (Barrett, 2003a). As an early childhood educator who believes that children play an active role in co-constructing learning through relationships (Vygotsky, 1978), I have sought to write songs which have potential to be far more than simply songs for children. I concur with Barrett’s view that children’s musical development is best served by adults who provide opportunities for children to be active participants in, and creators of, music, including songs. Therefore it is valuable for me as a researcher, song writer and educator, to analyse the six songs in this collection in relation to the three categories outlined by Barrett.

While four of the six songs were created for children, in that they were written away from children, all six of the songs were intended to be sung with rather than for children. I achieved this by writing songs with potential for participation and creative decision making by children. Some songs have limited opportunity for adaptation, notably I’m a drummer in a band and Look around at the colours; however these songs incorporate opportunities for individual turns, to drum or to find a colour, so that children are actively participating in the song with a song leader. I’m a drummer in a band also has potential for music making by children if the drummer is given freedom to create her own drumming rhythm patterns.
The two songs which were written for the children of the Eager Beavers room during the research were created for as well as with children. This was achieved in Space is a really big place because the song lyrics incorporated ideas provided by the children, and any verses added to the first were the children’s lyrics, although the music of the song was created by me for the children. Thus this song is music with children. Space is a really big place was especially significant in relation to Barrett’s (2003a) definitions because it inspired Ethan to create his own space song – music by children. Little pigs’ chorus was composed to some extent with children, as Ethan, Gemma and Lola provided me with the lyrics for the first section. However I created the melody and form, so the song is also music for children. The children altered the structure when singing it independently, eliminating the repetition of the first line, which was another instance of this song being music with children.

Although If a dinosaur came to your house is an example of a song composed for children, it also provides scope for the children’s choice of lyrics so that they help to shape the narrative of the song. Therefore it is also an example of music with children. Likewise Little steam train, composed for children, allows them to engage in dramatic enactment and to vary lyrics, tempo and dynamics, so that it is a song for making music with children.

Analysis of children’s songs according to Barrett’s (2003a) definition provides a way of viewing songs from the perspective of children’s
engagement with them. It is relevant to an exploration of the way new songs become part of existing musical cultures as this integration happens through interactive processes. Songs which have the potential for music making with and by children are those which invite active engagement, allowing children not just to sing along, but to respond physically and creatively to the song.

**Conclusion**

In this annotated song collection I have explored the ways children engaged with six new songs, in the context of the relationships and musical cultures of a group of three to five year old children in a child care centre. Overwhelmingly children’s need for communication and social interaction influenced both the writing of the songs and the children’s engagement with them. Relationships – between children and adults and between children and their peers – were central to the development of the lives of the six songs.

Singing and songs add richness and pleasure to all our lives, although they are often listened to rather than participated in. Contemporary research into the foundations of musicality (Cross & Morley, 2009; Dissanayake, 2009; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009), as well as research in ethnomusicology (Blacking, 1976) and music therapy (Baker & Wigram, 2005), show that music is a necessary part of life, for children and adults. Research such as that presented in this thesis provides evidence of the centrality of
communication, relationships and play to young children’s singing, and by implication, the centrality of singing and music to children’s lives.

This research brought new songs and increased pleasure in singing to a group of children. Its presentation in several diverse formats to meet the needs of diverse audiences enables its findings, which point to the value of songs and singing, to be more widely disseminated to those who share in singing with children.

The greatest gifts of the research were conveyed by Felix’s huge smile as he sang Look around at the colours with Molly, Danni and I, and by Ethan’s greeting to me one sunny spring morning:

Illustration 18 Ethan prepares to practice his dump truck song
Journal, 20 October, 2009

The children were playing outdoors when I arrived. I sat down on the verandah near some children and waited to see who would approach me. After a little while Ethan came running up and stopped behind me. He draped his arms around my neck, placed his chin on my shoulder and gave me a hug. “Did you bring your guitar today?” he murmured in my ear, “because I REALLY need to sing a song.”

I went to get my guitar and he had a long turn, strumming while I held my fingers on the fret board in the position of an E major chord, then taking over and using his fingers on the fret board in imitation of me. He strummed, moved his left hand and sang/chanted with perfect synchronisation of pulse. A group of children gathered to listen to him. “Sing your dump truck song,” his friend Cory asked him. “Yeah, dump truck song,” echoed Phil. Ethan looked at the circle of expectant, upturned faces, grinned and began his song.
Appendix Two:

Annotated song collection

for children
Six songs for young children

By

Amanda Niland
Introduction

Here are some songs I have written that I’d like to share with you. As well as the music and lyrics (the words) for each song, this book includes stories about how the songs were written. The children I’ve shared them with have given me lots of ideas for different ways to sing the songs. I’m sure you will have your own ideas too.
Look around at the colours
Wherever we look there are colours. We have different coloured eyes, hair and skin. Clothes, furniture, toys, cars and all the things made by people have colours. In the natural world outside, plants have colours. Some colours stay the same, but others change, like the sky.

We use our eyes to see colours. When we’re very small and we learn to speak, we discover the names of the colours we can see around us. In this song you can sing about the colours you see. When I sing this song with children some of them look for colours on themselves. Others find colours on their friends. And some children find colours around them. They might be tiny areas of colour which are really tricky to find, or big areas of colour which everyone notices, like the colour of the walls or the blue of the sky. I wonder which colours you can find where you are right now as you sing the song.
Look around at the colours, look, look around;
Look around at the colours, look, look around;
There are so many colours that, can be found;
Look around at the colours, look, look around;
Can you find any red?
Space is a really big place
This song is about space – that place around the planet Earth where we all live. There is nothing bigger than space. In fact, no-one really knows how big space is. Scientists say it is infinite. That means it goes on for ever.

I wrote this song because some children I know were very interested in pretending to travel in rockets to space. They had lots of questions about space and enjoyed exploring books on space travel, planets and stars, so that they could find answers to their questions.

Here are some of the things they wondered about:

How do people get up into space?

Why do astronauts float in space?

What’s in space?

How big is space?
The children drew pictures and made up stories about space, which you can see here. Their stories showed me they knew that space is really big, and that it takes a long time for astronauts to travel to another part of space. When I wrote this song I used the children’s ideas in the lyrics. I made up the first verse and the chorus, and then the children made up some more verses.
In this song you can pretend that you are an astronaut about to go travelling through space. Where would you like to go?

"My spaceship is flying. It's next to Jupiter and the Sun."
There are millions of stars, in space, ‘cause space is a really big place;
There are millions of stars, in space, ‘cause space is a really big place.
So put on a space suit; jump in a rocket;
Do up your seatbelt; start the countdown;
[spoken] 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0…blast off!
Then we’re zooming along, in space, ‘cause space is a really big place.
If a dinosaur came to your house
Have you ever wished that you could see a REAL dinosaur? I know I have. Dinosaurs lived many, many thousands of years ago, before there were any people. No-one quite knows why they all died out, but they have been extinct for a very long time. Dinosaurs were reptiles, which is the same animal family as lizards, snakes, crocodiles and alligators. Some of them were much bigger than any animals that exist now. What would you do if dinosaurs still lived and one came to your house? Where would you hide?
If a dinosaur came to your house, what would you do?
If a dinosaur came to your house, what would you do?
You could run; you could hide; under the bed; [children can devise alternate lyrics here]
Be very quiet....be very still...and listen..... [spoken] oh-oh!
Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

**Final verse:** [Repeat up to hiding place]
[spoken] Or you could say “A dinosaur couldn’t come to our house, because there are no dinosaurs any more, they’re extinct!”
I’m a drummer

in a band
Would you like to be a drummer in a band, holding drum sticks, pressing pedals and tapping out rhythms on the drums and cymbals all around you? In this song you can pretend to be a drummer. When I sing it with children they take turns to be the drummer and make up their own drumming patterns. If you were a drummer would you play loudly? Softly? Quickly? Or slowly?
I'm a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3;
I'm a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3;
I'm a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3;
I'm a drummer in a band, [spoken] 1, 2, 3.
I play my drums very loudly, [alternatives: softly, fast, slowly]
I play my drums very loudly,
I play my drums very loudly,
And then I stop!
Little steam train
Lots of children I know are really interested in trains, especially steam trains. I wanted to write a song about trains for them. In this song you can move like a train travelling down the track. Your voice can make steam sounds and your arms can go around like the wheels of the train. You can also do the work of a steam train driver – calling the passengers, stoking up the boiler with coal and tooting the whistle to let everyone know the train is leaving the station. What colour will your train be? Will it be fast or slow? Will it have a name? I wonder where your train will take its passengers.
Little steam train, you’re going out today,
Little steam train, we’ll help you get on your way;
Little steam train, you’re going out today,
Little steam train, we’ll help you get on your way.

First we call the passengers: [spoken] “All aboard!”
Then we dig the coal: [spoken] “Dig, dig, dig.”
Then we toot the whistle: “Whoo-oo-oo”; 
Then the wheels go around and we’re on our way.

The little pigs’
chorus
Do you know the story of the three little pigs and how they tricked the big bad wolf when he tried to catch them? The little pigs were so pleased to be safe in their brick house that they probably sang and danced to celebrate. This is the song they could have sung. You might like to make up a little pigs’ dance to do while you sing.
Hooray! Hooray! We’re glad to say
That the big bad wolf has gone away.
Hooray! Hooray! We’re glad to say
That the big bad wolf has gone away.
He huffed and he puffed but we wouldn’t let him in;
Not by the hairs of our chinny-chin-chins.
Hooray! Hooray! We’re glad to say
That the big bad wolf has gone away.